

YOU CAN HAVE IT ALL

By Opopanax

A/N:

Officially beta-read.

This story is inspired by Missing Presumed Missing? 3957804, and Harry Potter & the Fall of a dark Lord, 3195204, neither of which are, or likely to be, complete,, judging by their last update time. But they are interesting reads nonetheless. It is of a similar theme to my own oneshot Why Should I? as well.

However, this story is different from the aforementioned stories, and different than the other ones like it, at least the ones I've seen-Harry really does mean what he says and refuses to fight Voldemort. In almost all the angsty stories out there where Harry says "I've had enough," he ends up saying "well gee, I didn't really mean it" and goes back to kill Voldy for one reason or another. And there will be no pairings in here either. Should be fun.

Chapter1: After School

1: A Message for Voldemort

28 June, 1996

Lord Voldemort, A.K.A. Tom Riddle was sitting on his stone throne, considering his next moves in the war. He was highly incensed at his followers' failure to procure or hear the prophecy. More importantly, through their incompetence, he had been forced to reveal himself to that idiot Fudge much sooner than he had intended. And, on top of that, he had injured himself severely, both in the duel with Dumbledore and the possession of Potter. He had been forced to take a number of strengthening potions and restorative draughts to recuperate from that. His recovery was aided, however, by the fact that his body wasn't really a body as such; instead, it was a magical construct, rather like a Dementor. Very few people knew the history of the Dementors. They were in fact magical constructs, much like Basilisks. Voldemort's body was nothing more than a few drops of blood, a bone, and a hand, held together and given cohesion by the magic of what was left of his soul and his own followers' Dark Marks.

Leaning back on his throne and idly twirling his wand in his fingers, he reflected on the past year.

It had been very entertaining to watch the Daily Prophet slander and ridicule Dumbledore and Potter over the intervening months since his resurrection. After Potter had escaped, he had been highly angry for a time. Later, though, he realized it held a pattern; Potter had gotten lucky far too many times. After considering things, Voldemort decided that maybe it wasn't entirely luck, that maybe it was the prophecy coming into play. With this new idea in mind, he had instructed Severus to try and dig into the magical connection he and Potter shared to see if there was any way it could be manipulated. It wasn't until this past Christmas that he knew it could. He had been inside Nagini while she scouted out the entrance to the Department of Mysteries, and had felt another presence with him when she had bitten that idiot Arthur Weasley back at Christmas.

After that episode, he had instructed Severus to try and open this connection wider.

It had worked perfectly. Voldemort had planted a vision in Potter's head about his godfather being held captive in the Hall of Prophecy.

Potter had come, but here the plan got derailed slightly, because Potter had brought five of his friends along with him. This had resulted in twelve of his best Death Eaters being captured and the loss of the prophecy.

Voldemort was jerked out of his thoughts when a tapping came at the window of his sanctum. With a lazy flick of his wand, Voldemort opened the window.

A snowy white owl flew in cautiously. Voldemort raised a hairless eyebrow. "Potter's owl?" he muttered to himself.

The owl hooted and held out a leg.

Unfurling the scroll of parchment, Voldemort read the letter, a sense of incredulity rising higher with each sentence.

Dear Voldemort,

I bet you are surprised to be hearing from me, your supposed worst enemy. To tell you the truth, I'm rather surprised to be writing to you. But some things have come to light which I feel you must know in order to make an informed decision on this so-called war.

First, about the prophecy. While I don't personally feel that divination is worth anything at all as a discipline, I know both you and Dumbledore set store by the prophecy. As such, and to prove this letter comes with good intentions, I shall now tell you the half that Snape didn't manage to hear. Yes, I know Snape was the one who gave it to you; I saw it in a Pensieve, a memory I wasn't supposed to see.

"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches, born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies." This is the half you know. The part you haven't heard goes like this: "And the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not. And either must die at the hand of the other, for neither can live while the other survives. The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies."

There you have it. But, the thing is, I didn't know the prophecy at all, let alone that a prophecy even existed, until just after our little meeting at the Ministry; Dumbledore never told me. And this is the other reason I'm writing this letter.

To be perfectly honest with you, you can have this world. It has done nothing for me. Yes, you killed my parents, but I didn't know them, they were soldiers in this war and knew the risks, or at least I think they did. Do I wish you hadn't, so I could have a family? Yes I do. But I don't entirely blame you for it all. I don't know if Dumbledore told them the prophecy or not, and I don't really care.

Now, I know you want to kill me for what I represent, the fact that I'm the Boy-Who-Lived means you failed and it makes you look weak, but think about it. The only reason you failed was that damn prophecy. I propose that we both ignore the prophecy. You do whatever the hell you want, I don't care. Kill everyone in the Wizarding World for all I care; it doesn't matter to me anymore one way or the other. Leave me alone and I'll do the same. Since we both live, neither can die. The only reason I ever did anything to you was because Dumbledore manipulated me into it. Now, I quit. Do

whatever you want. I quit not out of cowardice, but because I have nothing to fight for any longer.

After learning the prophecy, after learning that Dumbledore values me as little more than a tool, after learning that I have no true friends, that everything that has ever happened to me is Dumbledore's fault, I quit. You can have everything. I won't stop you. The only people I would've fought for are either dead or don't want me around anymore, calling me too dangerous.

I am sending a similar letter to the Daily Prophet. It has probably already been delivered, and you should see it tomorrow, where I go into greater detail. You might find it entertaining.

This letter has been signed in blood and magic, so that you know what I'm saying is the truth. I wish you good luck in whatever it is you choose to do.

Sincerely,

Harry Potter

Voldemort threw his head back and laughed. Looking back at the letter, he chortled, "Excellent, Dumbledore! You have done what I failed to do, you have killed his spirit." Looking at the patiently waiting snowy owl, Voldemort nodded to it and said, "One moment while I draft a reply."

The owl hooted and nodded, as Voldemort quickly and gleefully penned a few lines:

Potter,

My first inclination is to kill you for your temerity, but I suppose a blood signed contract to not oppose me will suffice.

I am not interested in all your childish angst, Potter. Simply sign the contract and return it, and we need never have anything to do with each other. And please, no more whiny letters.

Lord Voldemort

Voldemort wasn't worried about the contract; his Horcruxes would protect him from any fallout should he breach the agreement. He didn't intend to breach it however. Potter had been a thorn in his side far too long, and if he was truly serious about a non-opposition policy, well, who was he to stop him? He'd prefer Potter dead, but out of his nonexistent hair would be good enough.

With a thin lipped smile, Voldemort attached the package to the owl. Now we shall see, he thought. Now we shall see.

2: Conversations

25 June, 1996

Harry Potter left Dumbledore's office in a daze. Not a daze of grief, but rage. Everything that had happened in his life now made sense. It was all purposefully orchestrated by the lying twinkle-eyed master manipulator upstairs so that he could have his perfect weapon.

At least I have my friends, he thought, as he navigated the halls toward the Hospital Wing. No matter what Dumbledore did, I still have friends. I will fight for them, not him.

Thoughts of his friends led naturally to thoughts of his godfather, Sirius Black. There was an aching chasm in his heart where Sirius once resided. Despite having only known the man for two years, Sirius had come to represent something extremely precious to Harry; hope. Hope that there was an outlet from his hellish life, hope that somebody actually cared for him beyond his title of Boy-Who-Lived. Ever since Harry was old enough to think, hope had been something which was foreign to him. From watching the other families at school and on Privet Drive, he knew his life was abnormal, knew that what the Dursleys put him through day after day, year after year was wrong and totally reprehensible.

Then Hagrid came, offering a new world, a new life. He remembered his thoughts on his first ride on the Hogwarts Express; that he didn't know what he was going to, but it had to be better than what he was leaving behind. Unfortunately, it hadn't turned out that way.

Everywhere he went, people pointed at him, talked about him like he wasn't there. They made up stories about him, lied about him, all

because they thought he was their personal entertainment or whipping boy. The only constants in his life were Ron and Hermione.

But even then, Harry wondered. With his new understanding of Dumbledore's motives, he wondered if he really did have any friends.

He was jerked out of his thoughts by voices coming from up ahead. Slowing down and peering cautiously around the corner, Harry saw he was just outside the hospital wing, from whence the voices issued.

Inching closer, he listened with a growing sense of betrayal, heartbreak, and rage.

"Hermione, are you going to sign this?" came the unmistakable voice of Ginevra Weasley. "You know this has to be done. Hanging around Potter is going to get us killed."

"Yes, I'll sign it," Hermione replied, sounding weak but determined. "I almost died from that curse Dolohov sent at me."

"I'll sign it too," said Neville. "He caused my father's wand to get broken."

"They tell me these scars won't ever fade," said Ron Weasley angrily. "And it's all bloody Potter's fault."

"I thought he was my friend," said the slightly less dreamy voice of Luna Lovegood. "But he led us all into a trap."

Harry's heart felt like it dropped to somewhere in the vicinity of the Chamber of Secrets. Slowly, he pushed open the doors and advanced into the Hospital Wing, his face a mask of rage and grief.

"So, that's how it is, then?" he asked. "You're blaming me for everything. No matter that I told you all to stay behind and that you came along anyway, it's still my fault?"

"Yes," said Hermione baldly. "It's getting too dangerous for us to hang around you. All these schemes you get tangled up in are going to jeopardize my chances of becoming Head Girl, or worse, killed."

Harry's gaze moved to Ginny, who flinched at the look in his eyes, but held her chin high just the same. "I agree, Harry. It was all right when it was the DA, but I don't want any part of the danger that hangs around you."

"And the fact that I saved your life in your first year means nothing?"

Ginny scoffed. "Dumbledore would've found me in time," she said, sounding utterly confident. "You were just being foolish and reckless as usual."

Harry turned to look at Luna. Her protuberant eyes were much more focused than they usually were as she just met his stare with one of her own. "I thought you were my friend, Harry Potter. But friends don't lead other friends into danger."

"I've put up with a lot from you, Potter, but now I'm physically maimed from following your stupid arse into another dangerous situation. I've had enough," sneered Ron.

"We've all signed a letter," said Hermione, holding out a piece of parchment. "It basically says the same thing."

At that moment, Harry James Potter felt something in him wither up and die. Without a word, he looked each one of his former friends in the eye, turned without a word and left, closing the hospital doors gently behind him.

There was a deathly silence in his wake. Each one of the five people in the Hospital wing had seen the hurt, betrayal and shock their revelations had brought upon him.

"Oh well, we're shot of him," said Ron. "Who wants a game of chess?"

Shrugging, they all settled down, Hermione with a book, Neville with his *Mimbulus Mimbletonia*, Luna with the *Quibbler* and Ginny with some end of year homework. Nobody would give a thought to Harry Potter until it was too late to do anything about it.

As Harry walked away from the Hospital Wing, he heard his friends' words playing over and over in his head. "You're dangerous ... hanging around you is going to get us killed." The last link of stability

in his life had just been taken away from him. No more, he thought. No more, I can't take anymore of this.

But fate, it seemed, decided that he could take some more of it, after all. As he was walking into the entrance hall, a fist came out of nowhere and struck him in the side of the face, sending him flying across the polished marble, his glasses cracking into pieces as they skittered away.

"It's all your fault!" roared a voice so unlike the usual genial soft tones of Remus Lupin that Harry didn't recognize it at first. "It's all your bloody fault that he's dead! The last of my friends, the only reason I'm even around anymore is dead, and it's all your fault! Your parents would have been ashamed of you!"

Harry lay there, dazed on the floor, blinking up at the enraged face of the werewolf as he towered over him. "If it weren't for you, Sirius would still be safely at home, but no! You have to go rushing off and make him come after you to rescue you!"

"But-"

"No more excuses, Harry. I will never, ever forgive you," said Remus coldly. And, with one final kick to Harry's ribs, Remus J. Lupin stormed out of the castle.

3: Dobby

29 June, 1996

Harry was sitting in his room at Number Four Privet Drive, after a long and boring train ride. All his former friends had avoided him, and he them. He had taken all his meals, including the end of year feast, in the kitchens, much to the delight of Dobby. "Harry Potter, Sir," Dobby had gushed, bouncing on his many layered socks. "How can Dobby be serving you today, Sir?"

Harry had smiled his first true smile since his night at the Ministry. "Just some sandwiches and pumpkin juice, please," he had said. "Oh, And Dobby?"

"Yes, Harry Potter, Sir?"

"Thank you for being my friend," Harry had whispered, tears coming to his eyes.

Dobby had hugged his knee, not saying a word. Harry understood.

He had sat by himself in a locked and warded compartment on the Hogwarts Express. Upon seeing the members of the Order at the train station-minus Remus Lupin, of course-he had ground his teeth and kept silent. Telling off Vernon Dursley was not going to work.

Sure enough, he had been beaten for telling lies and tossed into his room and locked in, only having been let out twice to use the bathroom. No food had yet been slipped into the cat flap. Harry didn't care, however. He didn't care about anything, not Voldemort, not O.W.L. scores, not anything.

He had spent his time writing a letter to Voldemort, and then a very detailed letter to the Daily Prophet. He poured everything he had been thinking about, all his grief and rage, all his torment, into that last letter. He hoped to be long gone by the time Dumbledore could do anything about it, however.

He was just tying the thick scroll addressed to the Prophet closed when Hedwig tapped at his window. His relatives hadn't barred it up, instructing him to send an "I'm fine" letter to the Order every third day or else.

"Hey girl," Harry addressed his only other true friend, allowing her to perch on his arm as he brought her close to his chest. Hedwig, sensing her pet wizard's mood, snuggled her beak into Harry's chest and woofed gently, letting him caress her soft feathers. Hedwig could feel the great mental anguish her wizard was feeling. She ached to be able to tuck him under one of her wide wings and shelter him like a chick, but settled for nuzzling him and making reassuring sounds.

"I know, girl, I appreciate the thought," Harry said to his owl, rubbing her beak with his cheek. "Don't worry, I'll be ok. You and I will be leaving this place of backstabbing hypocrites behind soon."

Hedwig snuffled gently and held out her leg, to which was attached a black envelope.

"I hope he didn't hurt you, girl," Harry said, untying the letter and unfolding it.

Hedwig shook her head and, with one last nip of his fingers, flew over to settle on her perch and sipped some water before tucking her head under one wing and dozing.

Harry read Voldemort's reply and unfolded the contract.

I, Tom Marvolo Riddle, hereby enter into an agreement with Harry James Potter. This agreement is as follows:

That I, Tom Marvolo Riddle, shall not willingly, by action or intent, seek to do harm, physical or mental, to Harry James Potter. That I shall cease any and all attempts to kill or otherwise injure Harry James Potter, either personally or through means of any acting under my jurisdiction.

By signing, Harry James Potter states that he agrees to and will abide by the terms listed above and that Harry James Potter shall not willingly, by any means physical or magical, oppose any actions that I might take, so long as they do not render harm to him.

Should any of the undersigned breach the terms listed above, it shall result in a loss of fifty (50) percent of their magic.

Should a second breach occur, the undersigned shall forfeit the rest of their magic, thus rendering the contract null and void.

This agreement was tendered on the twenty-ninth (29th) day of the sixth month (June) of the year nineteen hundred and ninety six (1996.)

Signed,

Tom Marvolo Riddle

Without hesitation, Harry signed the contract with the included blood quill, sealing his oath to leave Voldemort alone with blood and magic. He winced at his hand was cut into again by one of these vile things, but this time, it was for a good cause.

It was at this point that something totally unanticipated happened.

Magical bonds and oaths work on one basic, overriding principle: intent. If one intends to keep the oath, there is a flare of magic as the person's own inherent magic, which is built into the soul and mind of each witch and wizard, judges their truthfulness or intent to keep that oath. Should they be found duplicitous or that they do not in fact tend to keep to the terms of the oath, the magic will exact a price, usually said price to be listed in the terms of the oath. For instance, "I, Joe Smith, do hereby swear on my life and magic that..."

The terms in the above oath are such that, if Joe Smith is lying or in any way willingly breaks the oath, the cost of breaking the oath will be death and loss of his magic.

Magical contracts work in much the same way as magical oaths. But, while oaths are not legally binding, and instead are used to settle agreements personally, contracts can be entered into legal proceedings as evidence. Depending on the terms, breaching a magically binding contract can result in anything from mild discomfort to the complete loss of life and magic.

All this was well known by Harry; he had researched the topic thoroughly after the Triwizard Tournament fiasco. But what was not known was the fact that there were, in fact, two souls in his body—that of himself and a piece of Tom Marvolo Riddle, also known as Lord Voldemort. Because the inherent magic of the contract works by interacting with the magical core of those who signed it, and because this tiny piece of Voldemort was for the most part isolated and thus viewed as a separate magical core, and further because that piece had no intention of not trying to harm Harry, the contract came into effect.

Harry bit back a scream as he fell to the floor, intense, burning agony filling his scar. He seemed to hear a faint scream inside his head, before everything went black.

Back at Riddle Manor, outside Little Hangleton, Voldemort felt a brief pain spike through his head, but dismissed it as part of his recovery. He would never know that, by signing the contract, he nullified the prophecy. The most crucial lines of which were, "neither can live while the other survives" referred to the Horcrux in Harry's scar,

which was just eliminated by the signing of the contract. In short, Voldemort could be killed by anybody now.

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Groaning, Harry sat up. What the hell just happened? he thought blearily, rising unsteadily to his feet and staggering a bit.

Hedwig gave a concerned sounding hoot. "I'm ok, girl. Just something really weird happened in my head," he told his owl, scratching her head feathers, eliciting an avian purr of pleasure.

After the world stopped spinning, Harry took stock. Something felt ... different. It felt as if a veil had been lifted from in front of his eyes. Turning to open the wardrobe door, he looked at the full-length mirror and gaped.

The lightning bolt shaped scar on his forehead was almost gone, its outline only faintly visible. Where before it had been inflamed and angry looking, especially after Voldemort's resurrection, it now looked like nothing more than a birthmark. The incessant tingling he had been experiencing was gone, too.

"What the hell happened?" he asked again. "Did signing that contract do something?"

Resolving to think about it later, he looked at his watch to discover he'd been out for almost half an hour. "Damn, that must've been one hell of a contract," he thought wryly.

Turning from the mirror, He rolled both the contract and blood quill back into the envelope and gave it to Hedwig. "Take this back to Tom, girl," he said, stroking her back as he carried her over to the window.

Hedwig nibbled his fingers and launched off into the sky, heading for Little Hangleton.

"Dobby?" Harry called to the empty room.

With a pop, the excitable house-elf appeared in his room. "You is calling Dobby, Harry Potter, sir?"

"Yes, I did," said Harry, kneeling down to be at the elf's level. "How would you like to bond as part of the Potter family?"

Tears came to the large tennis ball sized eyes of the elf. "Dobby would love nothing more, sir. You is surely the greatest wizard ever!"

Harry laughed. "Thanks, Dobby. Now, I, Harry

"I, Dobby the house-elf, do hereby swear to serve the Potter family to the best of my ability, to keep their secrets, and to always keep the interests of the family above my own," Dobby said, completing the ritual which had been drilled into all house-elves from birth.

"So mote it be," said Harry, and there was a brief flash of magic as the bond was sealed.

"Now, I need you to do a couple of things for me," Harry said, rising and settling at his desk chair. "First, silence the room, please."

Dobby gestured and a shimmering field surrounded the walls.

"Ok, now. I'm thinking of leaving England," said Harry, cutting straight to the point.

Dobby gaped at Harry. "B-but what about He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, Master Harry, Sir?"

Harry shook his head. "I'm letting him have it. My friends turned on me, my Headmaster has been grooming me to be some kind of weapon, my only remaining family, Sirius, is dead, and everybody blames me for it. I have nothing to fight for."

Dobby's ears drooped sadly. "Dobby understands, Master Harry, sir. How can Dobby help?"

Harry pulled his vault key and a letter out of his pocket. "First, go to Gringotts and withdraw five hundred Galleons and have half of it converted to Muggle currency. Also, give this letter to the goblin called Griphook. Then, come back here and we'll take the next step."

"Dobby will do it, Master Harry, Sir," Dobby squeaked. "Dobby will be back soon." And, taking the little key and letter, the elf popped out.

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Sometime later, Harry was sitting on his bed, sorting through all his possessions when Dobby popped back in. The elf was clutching a bag and a wallet, both of which bulged with their respective currency. "Dobby did as ordered, sir," he said, bouncing happily. "What can Dobby be doing for you now?"

Harry smiled at the elf. "Can you side-along people when you do your popping?"

"Yes we can, Master Harry. Is you wanting to go somewhere?"

"Tomorrow, yes. But first, take this to the Daily Prophet. I'm sure they have a letter box. Don't let yourself be seen."

Dobby nodded. "I can be doing that, Sir."

Harry handed over the scroll and lay back. He was tired, so tired. He was tired of the persecution, of betrayals and dark lords. Tired of the manipulations and the lies, and in short tired of the magical world. He had had enough.

Fervently praying that tonight he would get a dreamless sleep that didn't involved snake-faced wizards rising out of cauldrons, or his godfather falling through tattered veils, or his friends denouncing him, Harry Potter drifted off to sleep, not caring about the firestorm that was about to be unleashed on Wizarding England by his letter.

4: The Daily Prophet

1 July, 1996

Later that night, the managing editor of the Daily Prophet opened the public mailbox to see if there were any letters to the editor before putting the next issue to bed. They had been doing a boom in business bashing Potter and Dumbledore. They had never seen a circulation so high as this year. And the discrete bags of Galleons handed over by Cornelius Fudge helped as well.

Not expecting much by way of any exciting letters, the editor's eyes widened as he found a thick scroll with Harry Potter written on the outside. Cracking open the seal, his eyes widened and widened until they seemed about to fall out of their sockets as he finished it. Oh Merlin, this is going to be big, he thought gleefully, handing it over to the enchanted printing press to be included in the next issue, due to be delivered in the morning. This is going to be absolutely huge. He never thought of the ramifications of the letter he had just received. What it meant for him, and everyone else, now that the only one prophesised to defeat the darkest Dark Lord in modern times was giving up.

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Hermione Granger prided herself on being a rational, upstanding girl. She prided herself on her academic performance and her intelligence. Until she had discovered she was a witch and was to attend Hogwarts, she had had few friends. She knew that she tended to be rather obsessive about books and learning, and that such attitudes were detrimental to forming lasting relationships at school. At first, she had figured she would be not much different than anyone else at Hogwarts. She had assumed that everyone would be as eager to learn magic as she herself was, and it never crossed her mind that magic users would be the same as their Muggle counterparts, at least inasmuch as their prejudices and intrapersonal relationships.

However, when she arrived at Hogwarts, she faced the very same ostracism from her classmates, even down to the same pejoratives being used against her. "Things like: Buck toothed bushy haired bookworm." Or even more endearing: "Miss Beaver." The term "Mudblood" was added, but she didn't find out what that meant until second year.

The ostracism and letdown had been so bad, in fact, that she had been crying in the girls' toilets on Halloween, contemplating asking her parents to pull her out of Hogwarts. She had been so sure this world would be different, that she would get to make friends as eager to learn as she was, but no. It was all the same, everywhere.

Then Harry Potter and Ron Weasley had barrelled into her life on the back of a mountain troll, and their friendship had cemented with

the crack of its club. For the first time, Hermione Granger had friends. Sure, Ron was a bit thick and Harry was a bit hotheaded, but they were her friends. She had helped Harry with that dragon and the Philosopher's Stone, worked out that a basilisk was attacking students, helped him save his godfather and helped him survive in the Triwizard Tournament. He had bellowed at her for not writing him over the summer last year, but Professor Dumbledore had said it wasn't safe and, being the great sorcerer that he was and the only one Voldemort ever feared she believed him. He did, after all, know best. It never occurred to her to think that, as a mere Headmaster, he had no right telling her to whom she could and could not write.

Now, she had nearly gotten killed following Harry into another dangerous situation, a situation of Harry's own making, in which he had lost his godfather. Hermione Granger was a smart, rational girl. She knew that most likely the situations would start getting even more dangerous, and being in Harry's orbit was likely to paint a huge target on her back. And she wanted no part of that. It was all OK when they were doing things at school-the professors were only a call away-but going out to fight Death Eaters? Hermione Granger had no doubt that if she stuck with Harry, their luck would run out and she would die, and in the most painful way possible.

So, she felt it was for the best that they cut ties with him, and all the others agreed with her. Perhaps some time at his relatives' house would give him time to reflect on the rashness of his actions and get him to think before rushing off next time. But, if he did, she didn't want to be there, catching the fallout of his mistakes.

Hermione's thoughts were interrupted with the arrival of the Daily Prophet. Absently putting a Knut in the owl's pouch, she sipped some tea and opened the paper. Only to promptly spray it all over the page as she read the letter printed there.

To the editor and readers:

"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal and either must die at the hand of the other..."

That's right, folks. According to this prophecy, which was housed in the fabled Hall of Prophecies, and for which I and five schoolmates battled a dozen Death Eaters and Voldemort himself for, I'm the one that's marked to defeat him.

I was "graciously" informed of this prophecy's contents by my esteemed headmaster mere moments after the loss of someone close to me. I must add that, personally, I believe the source of this prophecy to be laughable and a fraud. However, it does explain why Voldemort has such an unhealthy interest in me-the reason why he murdered my family while trying to kill me as a baby. Voldemort has known about that prophecy since shortly after it was given to Headmaster Dumbledore by Sibyll Trelawney (1) several months before I was born, while the headmaster deemed it unimportant for me to know. I seriously doubt his ever informing me if it were not for the fact that I had learned the existence of such a prophecy pertaining to me while fighting Death Eaters in the Department of Mysteries. A prophecy where it appears I am expected to be the wizarding world's sacrifice to protect it from the results of its corruption, complacency, bigotry and wilful ignorance.

His reason, or so he claimed, for withholding this bit of information was a desire to protect my innocence and not spoil my happy childhood. I almost gagged. What happy childhood? I certainly had no hope of a happy childhood; both Voldemort and Dumbledore made certain of that. Furthermore, why was I not better trained? He's known of the threat Voldemort represented, yet I have received no training necessary to face such a monster. As you'll soon understand, this is when I began to see Dumbledore in a much more suspicious manner, and to contemplate his motives towards me, and also to examine my life as a whole in the Wizarding World.

Hmm, where do I start? How about with a short history lesson?

In 1926 a young witch named Merope Gaunt, descendant of a long line of purebloods who could trace their ancestry back to Salazar Slytherin, had fallen in love with, and married a muggle nobleman named Tom Riddle. Several months later, Tom Riddle had abandoned a pregnant young Merope when she had revealed to him that she was a witch. Since her bigoted family cast her out for her relationship with a muggle, she had no one to turn to and was left alone and destitute on the streets.

December 31, 1926 a baby boy was born and this child was named Tom (after his father) Marvolo (after Merope's father, Marvolo Gaunt) Riddle. Unfortunately Merope died within an hour after childbirth and young Tom was left in a muggle orphanage where he was raised in a cruel, abusive and unloving environment. By the time young Tom arrived at Hogwarts, he had become an angry Muggle-hating young boy who sought only vengeance against both sides of his family that had abandoned his mother and him, and the world at large that failed to protect him. An anger and hatred that eventually grew into the Dark Lord Voldemort we have today.

I discovered all this through discrete research after my second year, wherein I faced a memory of Tom Riddle in the chamber of secrets; all this is a matter of public record.

Surely I am also not the only one to see the irony of how easily Voldemort is getting his revenge upon the world. Not only upon the Muggles for his father's abandonment but also from the pureblood bigots like those that banished his mother penniless onto the cold hard streets. I'm certain he finds it greatly amusing to have those bigots grovel before him while he pits them against Muggles. I'm even more certain he finds it most satisfying while he tortures and kills those same pureblood bigots himself for their 'failures'.

Now, how about we start at my beginning?

I was born on 31 July, 1980 to James Potter and Lily Potter nee Evans. A little over a year later on Halloween, my parents were murdered by Voldemort as he attempted to kill me because of the prophecy, which was given to him by a young Death Eater by the name of Severus Snape. Shortly afterwards, my godfather, Sirius Black, was arrested for the murder of Peter Pettigrew and several Muggles, as well as the belief that he had betrayed my parents' secret to Voldemort. He was sent to Azkaban for life with no trial or any effort by the ministry or the Wizarding World to learn the truth. The truth was that Peter Pettigrew was my parent's secret-keeper, and was the one who had betrayed them to Voldemort. Pettigrew had killed those Muggles as he successfully faked his death and framed my godfather. The result? By denying my Godfather the justice he was due, an innocent man was condemned to a hellish prison and a one year old child was condemned to an abusive home with the Dursleys-Muggles who despise magic and consider the inhabitants of the wizarding world, and I quote: "FREAKS!"

Despite warnings and objections from Professor McGonagall, I was placed there by Albus Dumbledore who believed that the prophecy and some sort of blood-magic protection (or so he claims) from my mother were more important than my well-being and happiness.

Now let me tell you a little about this oh-so-wonderful 'home' the Headmaster found fit for my childhood...

It wasn't until I started Muggle primary school at age five before I even learned my name was Harry Potter. All of my life I had always been called "boy" or "freak" by my so-called 'family' and reminded daily of how I was an unwanted burden upon them. A burden that frequently meant my going days without food, occasional beatings, living locked in a cupboard (when not cooking, cleaning or otherwise slaving), and receiving the cast-off clothing from my whale of a cousin. To this day I am still treated as such, but I suppose things have improved since rather than being locked in a cupboard, I am now kept locked in a small room with a cat flap in the door. This is the environment a one-year old child was left in by the so-called Leader of the Light. If only it ended there though...

He claims that his sole motive was concern for my safety. But yet there still remain many more questions unanswered. How could such vaunted blood protections truly exist? Something that he claims can supposedly stop even unstoppable killing curses. Are they commonly used by wizarding families to protect their own children? If not, then why aren't these protections used universally? If so, does this mean that every child is immune to the killing curse? For that matter, how does anyone know that it was the killing curse that was cast at me by Voldemort? There are no known witnesses, and it is obvious that Voldemort's wand was never recovered, for he has it now. So how does anyone know that level of detail? Or did everyone merely accept the word of Albus Dumbledore, the man who kidnapped me from my rightful guardian that very night?

I also wonder the wisdom of telling the public of my identity. The instant I walked into the Leaky Cauldron on my eleventh birthday, I was immediately recognized as Harry Potter. If Albus Dumbledore was so concerned with my safety, then why did he tell everybody that Harry Potter vanquished Voldemort and was left with only a lightning bolt shaped scar on his forehead?

Not more than a week ago, he fully admitted that he was aware of my living conditions in his office: "Five years ago you arrived at Hogwarts, Harry, safe and whole, as I had planned and intended. Well - not quite whole. You had suffered. I knew you would when I left you on your aunt and uncle's doorstep. I knew I was condemning you to ten dark and difficult years." Now my question is, why would he do this? Why would he intentionally place any child in a situation where he knew and obviously intended for them to be hated and abused? Why did he place and keep me in an environment eerily similar to what baby Tom Marvolo Riddle was left to? Am I not deserving of a normal loving home environment? Or was I merely some form of experiment to salve his conscience for perhaps not helping Riddle once he came to Hogwarts? That if he could subject another child to such a cruel environment and he not become a raving Dark Lord then Dumbledore could feel relieved of any responsibility for Riddle's transformation into Voldemort?

Or, perhaps, was it really something much more insidious? Did he perhaps hope and plan for the neglect and abuse to leave me more open to his kind grandfatherly image and thus ensure his control of me as an eventual weapon against Voldemort?

Most importantly, is this what the wizarding world wants and is willing to allow to happen to its children? If so, why would I want to be a part of that world, much less fight and possibly sacrifice my own life for it?

Now, some of you dear readers out there might argue that I am being harsh and the headmaster means well or is just senile or incompetent. However, with the recent information of the prophecy, I've begun to see my past in a new light and I have come to the conclusion that it was his intent to make and keep me dependent upon him so that I would trust him and not notice his subtle manipulations to use me as a weapon against Voldemort. He wanted control over me and until now he has had that control; but no more! He has proven that my trust in him was severely misplaced when it comes to my own personal well-being and I refuse to be his pawn any longer!

Furthermore, I severely doubt the very existence of these so-called blood protections he claims to protect me while at the Dursleys because I find it highly improbable that love-based blood magic can

be sustained by residing with a family that despises my very existence. In any case, the protection was rendered ineffective when Voldemort used my blood for his resurrection

How did I reach such conclusions, some of you might ask? His own admission that he knew he was effectively sentencing me to a life of hatred and abuse to anti-magical bigots was what really made me begin to think through what I've been through since coming under his influence.

To answer that question, we come to my return to the wizarding world from Muggle exile and my first year at Hogwarts. Upon my first entry into Diagon Alley I was taken by Hagrid to see Mr. Ollivander to obtain my wand. Although I was unaware of the true significance at the time, I learned that my wand was the brother to that of Tom Riddle's- containing a phoenix feather for its core. One of only two feathers given willingly by what I later learned to be Fawkes, the headmaster's own phoenix familiar. Most curious that Voldemort would share a brother wand with myself, cored with feathers from the headmaster's own phoenix. I would be willing to bet a great deal that my own wand has been made since sometime after my birth and the headmaster had somehow attuned it to me. Perhaps by use of my blood to ensure its match, since he has stated that he's already been quite free in his use of my blood for his blood wards upon the Dursley residence?

However, that is but the first chapter to this story of lies, betrayal and manipulation. For, little did I know the danger that was in store for me when the headmaster saw fit to bring into the school a powerful artifact that Voldemort was trying to obtain.

First, if Voldemort was after it, why did the headmaster have the Philosopher's Stone brought into a school full of children? Why draw that monster to Hogwarts while it was full of innocent young children? Especially when Dumbledore knew by way of the prophecy that he would be unable to protect us from him?

Second, why have it retrieved and brought by one who he had to have known by now couldn't keep a secret? Something my friends and I discovered within months of meeting him, while the headmaster has known him for more than fifty years. (Sorry, Hagrid, my friend, but it's true!) I also find it strangely convenient that Voldemort, having been stuck in an incorporeal state for nearly a

decade, now just so happened to suddenly find out about this artifact which has been used by Nicolas Flamel for centuries and it just so happened to be brought into Hogwarts at a time that I had begun attending.

How convenient is it that three first-year students would so easily learn of something that was supposed to be kept secret enough to protect it from someone as experienced and powerful as Voldemort. It is now obvious, with the gift of hindsight, how the circumstances were contrived to make us aware of the stone's presence and its being sought after by Voldemort. All the while, the headmaster and the rest of the staff seemingly remained blissfully unaware of Voldemort's presence in the castle, brought in on the back of the head of Professor Quirrell, our then Defence against the Dark Arts professor, whom curiously, the headmaster himself had hired.

Third, why were the obstacles to protect the stone so relatively simple, clearly designed towards the strengths of, and so easily passed by, a trio of eleven year old students? I find it odd that there were such pathetic obstacles-pathetic in that they were simple enough to be bypassed by three children, two of whom were even Muggle-raised, and yet were supposed to protect the Philosopher's Stone from someone as knowledgeable and powerful as Voldemort. Surely a large cutting of Devil's Snare is not much of an obstacle to a dark lord of Voldemort's power? Or how about a game of chess, one of little enough difficulty to be won by an eleven-year-old boy? Or perhaps a room full of animated flying keys, where, instead of having all false keys, they left the actual key to the door fluttering about?

After the three of us managed to pass through those obstacles, we came upon a room containing a troll of all things. Not only was that troll put there by the very man trying to steal the stone, but it was unconscious as well, a good indication of truly how much of an effort the headmaster had put into protecting the stone.

Next we had a logic puzzle most suited to the talents of the smartest girl I know where a particular potion must be drunk to continue further. Again, a relatively simple puzzle solved by a mere child is supposed to stop a great and powerful dark lord? Why even have the correct potion there at all? Why not make what should be the correct potion indicated by the puzzle actually be some kind of

deadly poison while the headmaster keeps the correct potion himself?

All these seeming "coincidences" are far too convenient for it to be anything other than completely contrived. With an objective examination of the facts, it doesn't appear that our headmaster is as innocent as we are commonly led to believe, but rather this was truly his intent. If not, then perhaps he can explain how three children who just happened to have enough tidbits of information dropped by the Headmaster himself, [potions professor and the grounds-keeper, to spark and hold their curiosity, guiding us to my eventual confrontation with Quirrel/Voldemort?

It's actually quite simple. Voldemort was drawn to Hogwarts by Dumbledore, where, despite the fact that I was only eleven and had barely a year's worth of magical knowledge, I was expected to stop Voldemort as the prophecy dictates. There wasn't any true effort to protect such a powerful artifact. Rather, it was used by our headmaster as bait-a means to draw Voldemort and I into a confrontation where it was apparently his hope that I would

Our headmaster's chillingly reckless endangerment of so many young lives appears based upon an obviously arrogant belief in his own infallibility. That he knows what is best for the world regardless of the price to others and is somehow solely qualified to make such decisions on everyone else's behalf. Who appointed him to this position of god? What gives him the right to act with such impunity in defiance of the law and, more importantly, the safety and well-being of others? Frighteningly, it doesn't end there...

In my second year, the ministry again imprisoned an innocent man in Azkaban without a trial-Professor Hagrid-when the Chamber of Secrets was opened by a first-year student, Ginevra Weasley, releasing a basilisk into the school. A student that was possessed by the diary of Tom Riddle, also known as the self-proclaimed Lord Voldemort. Incidentally, "I am Lord Voldemort" is an anagram of Tom Marvolo Riddle's full name. The cursed diary was given to that first-year by none other than Lucius Malfoy, a governor on the Hogwarts Board and political supporter of Minister Fudge. I was forced to face not only a spectre of Voldemort, again, but Slytherin's pet basilisk, which I very nearly died fighting. If it were not for the aid of Fawkes, Dumbledore's phoenix, I would have died from the venom when I was bitten while killing it. My friends and I were but

twelve years old and yet not only solved the mystery of the attacks but also a single twelve year old boy was left to fight a thousand year old basilisk.

With something as simple and easily obtainable as a sneakoscope being able to detect the presence of dark magic and items, as well as it being well known that the headmaster possesses dark magic detectors in his office, that diary should have never made it into the school unless he allowed it in. An item that nearly cost the life of young Miss Weasley. Where was the Headmaster? Shouldn't this have been his responsibility and not that of a bunch of twelve year olds? Is it really so easy to bring such dark and deadly items into the school? Or only when it suits his purposes?

However, what makes me suspect this to really be the headmaster's complicity in yet another confrontation between Voldemort and I was the appearance of Fawkes, the headmaster's phoenix, during my fight with Tom Riddle and Slytherin's basilisk. Very convenient that he knew where and when to find me and that he had (thankfully!) brought with him the sorting hat with Gryffindor's sword. The headmaster had led us to believe that he had no knowledge of the whereabouts of the supposedly well-hidden Chamber of Secrets, yet his own phoenix just happens upon it while bringing weapons when I needed them most. Curious indeed. With my newfound understanding I am no longer left wondering why he knew so much, yet did so little.

My third year saw three attempts on my life and soul by the Dementors sent by the Ministry to Hogwarts. Why would the Ministry send such dangerous creatures to guard a school full of children? Why would the headmaster allow such a thing? Surely a hundred hungry, soul devouring creatures are far more dangerous than a single suspected, but non-convicted murderer? In the infinite wisdom of the ministry and Albus Dumbledore, apparently not, I guess. Or did they each have an ulterior motive? The Minister has already shown that he considers me a threat and has tried to kill me with Dementors since then. As for the headmaster, well... How is it that Peter Pettigrew had gone twelve years undetected in Hogwarts (as the Weasley pet Scabbers the rat) by the headmaster when a few students had in their possession a simple item that showed his presence within the school? An item called the Marauder's Map, created by my father and his friends while they were students that showed the names and whereabouts of everyone in Hogwarts

Castle. Given how the headmaster always knows right where to find someone when he wants to, I find it hard to believe that he doesn't use something similar. And because of the headmaster's keeping me ignorant of my family's history, the significance of Pettigrew's presence was lost upon me until near the end of the year. It was when we finally met Sirius just after he had captured Pettigrew that things were finally brought to light.

What the rest of the wizarding world took as common knowledge—that Sirius had betrayed my parents, killing Pettigrew and those Muggles in his escape—was denied

Why did the headmaster keep such information from me? Was it because he was complicit in Sirius' being blamed and incarcerated for twelve years? It certainly appears obvious now that he needed my godfather and legal guardian out of the way so that he could control my upbringing and thus control me as his weapon. After all, imagine my surprise to have learned that it was actually Dumbledore himself who cast the Fidelius charm hiding our home at Godric's Hollow and would thus have known that Peter Pettigrew was the true secret-keeper rather than my godfather, Sirius Black.

Perhaps even more telling was while Sirius was explaining what had happened, Professor Snape attacked us and allowed Pettigrew to escape. Having been a Death Eater during the same time as the betrayal, surely Snape knew the truth regarding Pettigrew being the true traitor? Because of Pettigrew's escape, my godfather was no longer able to prove his innocence and was again forced into hiding, unable to claim his legal guardianship over me. It was curious how the headmaster made no effort to help prove his innocence, despite his ability as Chief Warlock, to have gotten him a trial with Veritaserum or Pensieve testimony, leading me to wonder at the level of loyalty displayed between the headmaster and Professor Snape. After all the years of abuse that the potions professor has been allowed upon non-Slytherin students by the headmaster, it would not surprise me that Professor Snape returns that loyalty and intentionally allowed Pettigrew's escape and withheld his knowledge of Pettigrew's existence as the true traitor. Add to this the fact that it was Professor Snape who gave the first half of the prophecy to Voldemort, it does make me wonder.

Knowing all of this, I can only believe that the headmaster needed Sirius to remain a fugitive in order to keep me under his thumb.

The one thing I don't understand is how the Weasley twins, Fred and George, who had the Marauder's Map prior to me could have missed Pettigrew's existence as well. They certainly knew of the significance, since everyone seems to know more about my 'famous' history than myself. After all, it can't be everyday news that someone gets sent to prison without a trial like Sirius did for supposedly betraying my family to Voldemort and murdering Pettigrew. Given the number of books written about the Boy-Who-Bloody-Lived, the fact that my history is covered in fourth year History of Magic and questioned about on the OWL exams, I can only suggest that they should be tested for the presence of memory charms.

Even worse, with Pettigrew's escape, he was able to resurrect his master into a corporeal form at the end of the Triwizard Tournament in my fourth year. A year where I was yet again in danger and set up for a confrontation with Voldemort, because our illustrious headmaster hired a Polyjuiced Death Eater as our DADA instructor. If the headmaster is truly innocent, then I must wonder at the apparently superb acting skills of that Death Eater, in that he was somehow able to fool the headmaster into believing he was Alastor "Mad-Eye" Moody. Mr. Moody is a more than twenty year long personal friend and ally of the headmaster's from the first war against Voldemort, yet the headmaster was fooled for an entire year of sharing meals, staff meetings and living within the same castle? The Death Eater was able to not only get my name to come from the Goblet of Fire, despite my not having entered, but the headmaster informed me that I had no choice but to participate despite my protests. I never realized how easy it is to force others unwillingly into binding magical contracts. Or is it really?

In any case, because of my compelled participation, the Death Eater then turned the winner's cup into a portkey and delayed the other participants so that I would reach it first.

How convenient for the headmaster that the Death Eater he hired as a professor set the stage for yet another confrontation with Voldemort. I was so disgusted with everything that I gave the winnings away, wanting no further part of it. I had never had any need or want of the fame or money.

Of course, when I reported Voldemort's return as well as the identities of several Death Eaters that he had immediately summoned to witness my execution at his hand, Minister Fudge's only response was, "No. He can't be. He just can't be back." In spite of his own statement which I overheard the previous year, where he said something like, "Powers gone, horribly weakened, he fled." This suggested to me that he did, in fact, know that Voldemort might return some day.

However, instead of verifying that I was telling the truth, he instructed Dementors to 'kiss' the captured Death Eater cum professor without allowing any questioning, while calling me a lying, attention-seeking brat, and then setting about assassinating my character in the press. Anyone who knows me knows that I loathe the attention and yet the Ministry and the wizarding press all chose to attack me as being crazy rather than face the hard truth and work to stop Voldemort before he could regain his strength and rebuild his group of followers.

If nobody else is willing to fight to stop him, then why should I?

Even worse, in an attempt to prevent the truth from ever getting out, Senior Undersecretary to the Minister, Dolores Umbridge recently gloated to none other than Draco Malfoy, overheard by myself and others, how she was the one who sent two Ministry Dementors after my cousin and I during the summer after the Tournament. If it were not for my ability to cast the Patronus that I learned during my third year, my cousin and I would now be soulless husks. However, because I had the audacity to defend my life and soul along with that of my Muggle relative, the ministry chose to prosecute me for underage use of magic and violation of the statutes of secrecy. An incident that would never have happened had the ministry not just attempted to kill me with its Dementors. Was I really supposed to just let them devour my soul? Fortunately, at least half of the Wizengamot decided that I was justified in defending myself. Though, I am left wondering at the sanity, humanity and motivations of those who didn't.

Having failed at that task, Minister Fudge chose to appoint Umbridge to the once more vacant DADA post, and then as High Inquisitor, where she issued educational decrees to silence dissent and forced the repeated use of a blood quill upon myself and other non-

pureblood students who disagreed with her edicts, which has left me with another scar, this time courtesy of the Ministry.

Also in her position as High Inquisitor, Umbridge formed the "Inquisitorial Squad", a group comprised solely of all Slytherin purebloods, several of whom, as it turns out, were the children of the later captured Death Eaters. This squad was led by Draco Malfoy, son of recently captured Death Eater Lucius Malfoy.

Rather than help to protect the school and students, the squad focused on terrorizing and assaulting non-pureblood students and anyone they associated with.

Umbridge even went so far as to illegally use Veritaserum (supplied by Snape) upon me, and later attempted to cast an unforgivable (the Cruciatus Curse) upon myself, thankfully stopped by Hermione Granger.

On a side note: Anyone taking bets on Lucius Malfoy bribing his way out again with the unverified excuse of being under the Imperius Curse? Why not use Veritaserum and actually learn the truth for once? But then again, Lucius is well known to have Minister Fudge in his pocket and can probably afford to avoid such an inconvenience.

Also, is anyone else sensing a pattern with the DADA professors we are getting at our oh-so-safe and illustrious school?

Getting back to the story. While I was dealing with Umbridge's antics, and despite well knowing of Professor Snape's intense personal hatred of my father and thus by extension me, Headmaster Dumbledore required that I attend private Occlumency lessons with Professor Snape because of the visions that were being forced upon me by Voldemort through his mark-the scar on my forehead. Lessons that Snape used as a further opportunity to exercise his personal hatred of me by inflicting further pain and difficulty rather than teaching me anything useful. In fact, my nightmares and visions only worsened after Professor Snape's so-called attempts at Occlumency lessons, leaving me questioning his motives and if it was by the headmaster's design. After all, near the end of the year, one of those visions was used by Voldemort to lure me to him. I was led to believe that Voldemort had captured my godfather and was torturing him in the Ministry's Department of Mysteries, and when I

tried going to Professor Snape for help, I was ignored and dismissed. Since it was well-known that I would never leave my godfather to such a fate, again it seems I was set up to face Voldemort more by design than fate.

It wasn't until near the end of the year, after my friends and I battled with Voldemort and his Death Eaters in the Ministry, that everyone was finally able to learn the truth about Voldemort's return. A battle that cost the life of my godfather when he fell through the veil fighting recently escaped Death Eater Bellatrix Lestrange.

Sirius Black died a hero and yet remains a mass-murderer in the eyes of an uninformed public because of a corrupt Ministry and Wizengamot that takes every opportunity it can to avoid the truth when it suits their purpose. Combine that with a Chief Warlock with far too many secrets and personal agendas caring little for any kind of justice or truth and this is the result you get.

On top of all that, my so-called friends, Hermione Granger, Neville Longbottom, Luna Lovegood and Ginny and Ronald Weasley took me aside after we returned from the Ministry and told me that because they feel hanging around me is going to get them killed, they wanted to cut ties with me. They blamed me for their injuries, even though I told them not to come. They blamed me for my godfather's death. They blamed me for leading them to such danger. Hermione even told me that hanging around me would jeopardize her chances of becoming Head Girl.

Remus Lupin told me the same thing, that I was to blame for Sirius's death, that my parents and he would never forgive me, and that he never wanted to see me again.

So now, I have absolutely no reason to stay and fight for you. My friends think I'm dangerous, my parents' last remaining friend hates my guts, and Dumbledore wants to use me as a weapon. Well, I refuse.

This more or less brings us to today. A day where I once again find myself locked in a room in the Dursley household, having been allowed nothing to eat for the past two days. It is during times like these that I understand just what Voldemort so hates about this world.

Now that you know all of this, which I freely offer to verify under Veritaserum and Pensieve memories), I again ask you why you believe I should fight for you? Why should I sacrifice my life for you? As I see it, the wizarding world is largely responsible for my hellish life and in no way deserves my help in fighting Tom Riddle or his followers. A person needs a reason to want to fight -something worth fighting for -and I have none.

So, in closing, perhaps I can put Voldemort's concerns to rest. You see, I have decided that I would like to offer him a truce where I am no longer going to oppose him and his followers. While I have no intention of following him or becoming dark myself, neither do I any longer intend to fight him. The prophecy be damned. So long as he and his followers leave me alone, Voldemort can have the whole lot of you for all I care. May you enjoy the fruits of your manipulative self-serving leaders, your ignorance, your bigotry and your apathy.

I have even signed a contract in blood and sent it to Voldemort stating the same thing: you can have everything, I quit.

Yours Sincerely,

Harry James Potter,

The Boy-Who-Bloody-Doesn't-Care-Anymore

Chapter 2: Intrigues

1 July, 1996

1: New Plans

With a scowl and a muttered curse, Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore threw the newspaper down on his desk. Not being able to sit due to the rage filling him, Dumbledore rose and paced furiously around his office.

Damn that child! He raged. I will see him broken for this! How dare he!

Coming to a stop in front of the fireplace, Dumbledore threw a pinch of Floo powder into the flames with perhaps a little more force than necessary. "Number Twelve, Grimmauld Place!" he said into the fire.

Closing his eyes against the spinning sensation, Dumbledore's head came to rest in the kitchen fire at headquarters. "Arthur? Molly? Remus?"

The battered form of Alastor Moody stumped into view. "I'm guessing this is about the Prophet this morning, Albus?" he said without any preamble.

"Yes indeed. I need you to go and retrieve Mr. Potter from Privet Drive, immediately. Bring him to Headquarters, and I'll deal with him," said Dumbledore coldly.

"Will do, but I think you'll be wasting your time," Moody grunted. "I bet he's already done a runner."

"Who was on guard duty last night?"

"Tonks. I believe she's still there."

"Well, she hasn't mentioned anything to me so far. Go and bring Mr. Potter there. He won't be going back this summer."

"Very well, will there be anything else?"

"Yes. If possible, retrieve Mr. and Ms. Weasley, Ms. Granger, Ms. Lovegood and Mr. Longbottom."

"Got it. Will you be coming?"

Dumbledore smiled. "Oh yes. I'll be there."

With a curt nod, Moody stumped off to his task. Dumbledore pulled his head out of the fire. Oh yes, Mr. Potter. You will bow to your destiny, or else.

Returning to his desk, Dumbledore reread Potter's letter, feeling his rage blossom anew. How dare he? Everything Dumbledore had done had been for the greater good. The downfall of Voldemort had been worth any cost. While the loss of the Potters and incarceration of Black had been regrettable, they were necessary moves in his chess game to control the child of the prophecy.

When Dumbledore had arrived at Godric's Hollow on Halloween of 1981 and seen the destruction of the Potter house, coupled with the unconscious body of Peter Pettigrew, he had known instantly that the first stage of the prophecy had come to pass and that his scheme to get Voldemort into contact with the Potters had worked. Acting quickly, Dumbledore modified Pettigrew's memory and portkeyed him to a London alleyway, where he had been spelled to sleep for the next twelve hours. When Sirius Black arrived a few minutes later, Dumbledore placed a compulsion on him, having hidden in a shrub.

Black would now track down Pettigrew and the next stage of Dumbledore's scheme would unfold. Hopefully, with the defeat of Voldemort and death of the Potters so fresh, the Aurors would stun Black right away. Knowing Bartemius Crouch, Black would probably be stuffed neatly into Azkaban without a trial and Dumbledore could then have Hagrid drop Harry off at Lily's sister Petunia's house.

It all went according to plan; Pettigrew and Black played their roles admirably. There was only one slight hitch-Pettigrew escaped the gas main explosion, but Dumbledore didn't find out until much later. It all worked out in the end, however. Harry was at the Dursleys' who would provide a cold, neglectful environment, allowing Dumbledore to sweep in and become Harry's personal saviour.

In 1991, Dumbledore's real plans began to take shape. It was, however, very disturbing that Harry had managed to figure everything out without Dumbledore realizing what he was up to. The Weasleys had been carefully selected to act as Harry's surrogate family. Ronald, being lazy and rather dim, was supposed to hold Harry back from studying too hard and questioning too much. Hermione Granger was a little unforeseen, but could be easily worked with. Her highly organized mind was very susceptible to compulsions, and her nearly worshipful obsession with authority figures helped as well. It was through her that Dumbledore managed to direct most of the trio's inquiries toward such things as the basilisk and Philosopher's Stone.

Harry had been performing his role admirably, not questioning, not learning too much and, most importantly, looking up to Albus Dumbledore for guidance. It wasn't until this past year that things started to go pear-shaped.

With the resurrection of Voldemort, (which Dumbledore had foreseen) came the culmination of one of his pet theories. Dumbledore believed that on that fateful night a piece of Voldemort's soul had been implanted unwittingly in Harry's forehead. This piece of soul gave Harry the gift of Parseltongue and, what was perhaps more valuable, insight into Voldemort's mind. But, even more valuable than that, was the fact that the connection might work two ways-that is, Voldemort would have access to Harry's mind as well.

Dumbledore fully expected Voldemort to take advantage of this connection. To aid this, he had distanced himself from Harry, hoping to build up enough resentment that the two could annihilate each other in a mental battle.

Unfortunately, the only evidence of Voldemort's influence was a slightly raised anger level in Harry. But, given the events of the previous year and the summer, it was highly likely Harry's own anger and not necessarily fed by Voldemort.

It wasn't until Christmas that Dumbledore knew his plan might be working. After having heard of Harry's vision regarding Nagini, he told Severus to try to open that connection wider, under the guise of trying to teach Harry Occlumency.

Again, things worked perfectly and the connection was indeed opened even wider, culminating in Harry's trip to the Department of Mysteries. The fact that five other students accompanied him on the journey was a bit of a setback, but not too much of one. It was Dumbledore's hope that Voldemort would try to possess Harry, using the link, and that Voldemort would be once again rendered bodiless through the magical backlash.

The fact that Harry might die as well was of little consequence, after all, for neither could live while the other survived... Regrettable losses, but necessary.

He knew of Voldemort's Horcruxes and had a pretty good idea of where they were. By rendering Voldemort incorporeal again, Dumbledore hoped to be able to destroy all the Horcruxes and announce that he, Albus Dumbledore, had defeated the Dark Lord Voldemort, aiding Harry Potter in so doing.

It hadn't worked out, however. Voldemort had indeed possessed Harry, but was driven out before any real damage was done. He was injured, but still very much alive. And, what was worse, he had been forced to tell Harry the prophecy. Dumbledore had no plans of telling Harry the prophecy; his job was to be a suicide bomber and they didn't need to know anything. He spun Harry a sad tale about love being the power the Dark Lord knew not and sent him away.

He would have to find some other way of bringing the two back together. Dumbledore was fairly certain the final battle would be a mental one; there was absolutely no hope that Harry could beat Tom Riddle in a magical duel, not with Tom's years of experience. He had a couple of other long term plans to make the meeting of the two happen, but in the meantime, he would have to set about destroying the Horcruxes.

But now, with one letter to the Daily Prophet, the child had gone and ruined everything.

He couldn't be Obliviated, because everybody now knew everything, or nearly everything, of Dumbledore's machinations. He would now have to scramble frantically to restore any sort of credibility and his public image. He would have to call in every favour he was owed to avoid prosecution. But, ultimately, he would have to bring Harry Potter back under control.

It was then that he saw the last paragraph of the letter. A contract? Harry had signed a contract to leave the Dark Lord unopposed? This would not stand! It was then that a new scheme began to manifest in the keen mind of Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore. And, feeling his rage bleed away in a wash of the acknowledgement of his own brilliance, the twinkle returned to his eye and he smiled.

#

Arriving at Headquarters, Dumbledore fixed his grandfatherly mask firmly in place before heading into the kitchen. Podmore, Moody, Tonks, and Shacklebolt were seated around the table, looking grave.

"Well, my friends, where is Mr. Potter?" Dumbledore asked, twinkling benignly at them all.

"He's gone, Headmaster," Tonks said quietly.

Just then, Dumbledore noticed the package sitting on the table, and paled. Sitting there was a pile of schoolbooks, on top of which rested the snapped pieces of Harry's wand.

"He left a note for the Dursleys which renounced blood kin and that he no longer considered their place home," Moody said. "The wards are almost gone already."

Dumbledore sank heavily into a seat. "He needs that wand to fight Voldemort. This is most unfortunate," he murmured.

"Headmaster, you can't be serious," said Tonks. "He's only fifteen."

"Have you read the Prophet this morning, Nymphadora?"

Tonks scowled at Dumbledore. "Don't call me that! And no, I haven't."

Before Dumbledore could answer, frantic footsteps thundered through the house, waking up the portrait of Mrs. Black in the hallway which instantly began shouting about blood traitors. Hestia Jones, Remus Lupin and Emmeline Vance crashed into the kitchen, limping and sporting various wounds, closely followed by five singed teenagers.

"Headmaster! We only just escaped ... You-Know-Who came for all of us," Vance panted."

"And Harry wonders why we cut ties with him," Hermione Granger muttered, nursing a slightly burned hand. "It's lucky my parents were out."

"The Burrow was burned to the ground with Bill and Percy inside," Ginny said quietly, tears running down her sooty cheeks. "We all congregated at Neville's house ... better wards. We only just got away. Mum and Dad were visiting at the twins' shop." she said shakily.

"Ginny notified me through our D.A. Galleons," Hermione added. "Are you proud of yourself, Headmaster?"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Granger?" Dumbledore responded, the twinkle noticeably gone from his eye, completely thrown off by the insolence he was hearing from the bushy headed girl who normally used to worship the ground he walked on.

Hermione fixed Dumbledore in a firm gaze. "I read Harry's letter this morning, Headmaster. While I don't want to be his friend anymore- just look at what being his friend got all of us! I can see where he's coming from. Everything in his life was a setup by you, because you just had to go and play god with his life."

Dumbledore sighed sorrowfully. "Young Harry was simply lashing out in his grief and anger, assigning blame to anyone within reach, Miss Granger. I assure you I held no malicious intent toward him," he said, putting on his sad grandfather face.

"Clearly the nargles have infected your brain, Headmaster," said Luna Lovegood, her mad eyes a little more focused than usual. "It looks to me as though you had Stubby Boardman arrested so he wouldn't be able to keep Harry."

Dumbledore blinked. "I beg your pardon, Miss Lovegood?"

Despite the gravity of the situation, Ginny gave a reluctant giggle. "She means Sirius."

"I see," said Dumbledore, looking slightly bewildered, while Luna continued to fix him with a dreamy, unblinking stare. "Nevertheless, the fact remains that we must find Harry. The world depends on it."

"Your plans perhaps, Headmaster, I hardly think the world depends on a fifteen year old boy," Hermione scoffed, in such a bossy tone, that it made Dumbledore want to smack her. "And anyway we don't want anything to do with him." She gestured at a limping Ginny, a singed Ron, and a scraped and bleeding Luna. "See what associating with him got us?"

"Harry taught you to defend yourselves, leading to you being here and not dead," Dumbledore responded. "Now, I need you to tell me if Harry might've told you where he would be going."

"No, Headmaster," Ginny said. "We told him that we didn't want to be around him anymore, that being his friend was too dangerous and that through his actions he lost his godfather. We haven't talked to him since."

All the other students nodded with a muttered "Damn right" from Ron.

"What about you, Remus?"

Remus shifted uncomfortably. "We, ah, discussed his actions and the consequences of his actions. It was because of his refusal to learn Occlumency that Sirius died."

"So it's all your fault," sneered Snape, who had just walked in, also looking a bit worse for wear. "You six have doomed the world to darkness, all because you were too cowardly. Pathetic bunch of Gryffindors," he spat venomously.

"What are you talking about, sir? We're not the ones who ran away," Hermione sputtered, looking quite indignant.

"Look at the package on the table, idiot child," Snape hissed, pointing at Harry's old books.

Hermione gasped and paled. "Th-that's Harry's wand," she stuttered.

"That's right. And because of you all, he has left us to our fate," Dumbledore said.

Ginny coughed. "Harry wouldn't really leave us to Voldemort. He might've had a tantrum in the paper, but he'll kill Voldemort for us."

"What gives you that idea, Weasley?" Snape snarled.

"W-well, it would be the right thing for him to do. Harry always does the right thing," Ginny said hesitantly, as if she didn't really believe it.

"No, you foolish girl, Potter would not fight for me. Potter would not fight for the Headmaster. He would not fight for the Order. He would fight for his friends and his godfather."

"Well there you go then," said Ron, shrugging.

"Stupid boy!" Snape hissed, stalking toward the students, who shrank back. "You six-" he snatched a glance at Lupin, who blanched "-took away all his reasons to fight! Because of you all, Potter has left the wizarding world, signed a contract to not oppose the Dark Lord, and doomed us all. Are you proud of yourselves?"

Ron scoffed. "He's a coward, running off instead of doing his duty. Besides, if anyone can defeat You-Know-Who, it's Professor Dumbledore, not "I-need-to-be-the-centre-of-attention" Potter."

"No, Mr. Weasley," said Dumbledore. "I cannot defeat Voldemort. No one else can defeat Voldemort but Harry."

"No, I don't believe that," said Neville. "There's always another way."

"Much as I hate the way in which it was told, the prophecy cited in Mr. Potter's letter is accurate. Voldemort marked Harry, therefore Harry is the one to defeat him," said Dumbledore, rubbing the bridge of his nose.

"Also, Severus is right. We went to Privet Drive this morning, where the Dursleys informed us that Harry had left, informing them that he no longer considered their house home and that he was renouncing all blood kin. This collapsed the wards I have set up around the house. In addition, we found his wand and all his school supplies in

his room. Mr. Potter is no longer there, and we have no clues as yet as to his whereabouts."

"Now, as for you six," he continued, fixing them all with a stern gaze. "Because Voldemort is linked to Harry's mind, he could not properly learn Occlumency. Voldemort was interfering with his ability to harness the mental arts." Dumbledore conveniently failed to mention that it was by his orders that Severus didn't actually teach the boy anything. And he would've been surprised to learn that, for once, his aims and Voldemort's were the same, with regard to that mental link.

Bringing his mind back to the meeting, Dumbledore stared at Lupin and the students, who squirmed a bit. "As I recall, Harry specifically told you all to stay behind, as he was afraid you might get hurt."

"We thought Sirius was in danger," said Hermione, her cheeks pinkening a bit. "We thought we'd make sure."

There was a tense silence, interrupted only by the ticking clock in the corner.

"I see," said Dumbledore, steepling his fingers. "And yet you all took it upon yourselves to blame Harry."

There was more silence.

Hermione stood up abruptly, followed by the rest of the students. "We have all made our views on this matter perfectly clear, Headmaster. We see no need to continue this discussion. We're sorry your plans have gone awry but it no longer involves us. Good day." The five students trooped out of the kitchen, leaving to find rooms, as most of their homes were now rubble.

"Well, Albus? What do we do now?" Moody asked.

"I do have a plan," said Dumbledore to himself, seething at the surprising rudeness and blatant disrespect that the stupid little Muggleborn had shown along with those other children who had made such a mess of his plans. He would break them all later, starting with her. Looking up at the Order members he continued: "But we need to find Harry first, obviously. Because his wand is snapped, we can't track him with it, and because of the collapse of the wards, all my means of tracking him through his magical

signature are gone too. I suggest that we all search the likely places; Diagon Alley, Hogsmeade, even Knockturn Alley. We will have to make inquiries with the conductor and the driver of the Knight Bus as well. Use any force necessary to get him back here. It is imperative that he be here to fight Tom."

"You forgot something, Headmaster," Snape interjected. "Since Potter has snapped his wand, he is likely to go Muggle."

"No, he won't," Dumbledore said confidently. "Harry is a wizard, and, despite all his claims to the contrary, he will stay in the wizarding world."

"About that letter, Headmaster," said Emmeline Vance timidly.

"Ah, yes. As I said I'm afraid that Harry is simply lashing out in his grief and anger, assigning blame to everyone he can," said Dumbledore, with his usual grandfatherly smile. "With his friends turning on him, I'm afraid poor Harry has most likely been stewing and thinking up wild conspiracy theories. Not that I am surprised by that reaction."

Most of the Order looked reassured, but Dumbledore was still the recipient of some suspicious stares. Harry was right about one thing, Dumbledore mused from behind his Occlumency shields, most people, wizard and Muggle alike, are a bunch of sheep. It will take more than one letter from an angry child to change the way the great Albus Dumbledore was viewed, no matter how explosive the letter might be.

"Now, if there's nothing else, we must find Mr. Potter. I will see you all tonight for a progress report," Dumbledore said, twinkling at them all.

The Order all rose with the scraping of chairs. The kitchen emptied rapidly, leaving behind only Dumbledore. It was time to enact his backup plan. With the bulk of the Order off chasing phantoms, Dumbledore could turn his attention to the other child of prophecy.

Dumbledore headed up the stairs, carefully crafting what he would say to young Longbottom. He had watched him grow up, carefully suppressing any accidental magic. Neville had to stay under the radar, even more so than Harry. It was imperative that he not call

attention to himself. The child was now little more than a squib, thanks to all of the blocks on his core. By implanting a Legilimency-based, time-released lock on his magic, Dumbledore hoped to send Longbottom to the Dark Lord as a bomb.

Arriving at the second floor, Dumbledore ambled down the hallway toward the room where Longbottom and Weasley were gathered. Knocking gently, he entered the room.

"Ah, Mr. Longbottom, I wondered if I might have a word with you?" Dumbledore asked, smiling serenely.

"S-Sure, Professor Dumbledore, sir," Neville stammered. To his knowledge, he had never been directly addressed by the Headmaster before this day.

"Would you please excuse us, Mr. Weasley?"

Nodding sullenly, Weasley stumped out of the room and slammed the door. Maybe Hermione would let him put his hand down her shirt at last.

"Now, Mr. Longbottom, You said that there is always another way, in reference to defeating Lord Voldemort."

"Yes, Sir, I did," said Neville timidly.

"I don't know if you are aware, but you are the other child of the prophecy," Dumbledore informed him, after putting up privacy charms.

"R-really?"

"Yes, yes indeed you are. You were also born as the seventh month dies, only a few minutes before Harry."

"So, what does this mean for me?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I thought you might like to take this as an opportunity to avenge your parents. Since Harry is not here, and it is not likely we will find him, it is up to you to stop Voldemort."

"But...I haven't got any special powers, I'm nearly a squib," Neville said, but hope shone from his face. This was his opportunity to be something other than clumsy old Neville Longbottom, something other than the comic relief in Gryffindor tower.

Dumbledore smiled. "Not to worry. I have given the matter some thought and have come up with an idea. We will conduct a basic power enhancement ritual which will increase your powers over a seven day timeframe, after which you will be fully half again as powerful as you are now."

"Wow," Neville breathed. "Do you really think I might have a chance to defeat You-Know-Who then?"

"I fully believe so, yes," said Dumbledore, smiling broadly. The child was so malleable.

"Let's do it," Neville said, looking excitedly at Dumbledore.

Chuckling, Dumbledore nodded. "I must put you to sleep, child. This is likely to generate a little pain as the ritual interacts with your magic."

"OK, sir, I trust you," Neville said innocently.

"Somnus Maximus," Dumbledore intoned, sending Neville off to sleep. Then, waving his wand in intricate movements, he began the process of replacing the blocks on his core with time-release ones. If the magical explosion didn't kill him, it would turn Neville into a squib. Regrettable losses again, but the downfall of Voldemort was worth any cost. It was also a bit petty of him, he would freely admit, but after the way the boy had bolloxed his plans coupled with the blatant disrespect shown towards him, Dumbledore didn't feel as guilty as he had done before with Harry.

After about twenty minutes, Dumbledore finished, a light sheen of sweat shining on his forehead. There was a great deal of magic dammed up behind the blocks; the explosion when they all shattered would be spectacular. Conjuring a parchment and quill, he left Neville a note:

Dear Mr. Longbottom,

I have successfully finished the ritual, and by this time next week, your power should be doubled. I will come for you the day before that happens, to set you up for your new training regimen. It will not be easy, but I have faith that you will prevail.

Unfortunately, I must go to see to Wizengamot business, so I cannot be there when you wake up. Should you experience any symptoms, such as dizziness or light-headedness or ears ringing, Floo call Professor McGonagall immediately and she will come to take you to Madam Pomfrey.

With high hopes for your recovery, I remain yours,

Albus Dumbledore

Folding the note, Dumbledore set it on the bedside table and headed down the stairs. He had to get back to Hogwarts to set up the rest of the plan for getting Neville and Voldemort in the same room, one week from today. It shouldn't be all that difficult; Tom's ego really was monumental. All Dumbledore would have to do would be to tell Severus to inform Voldemort that the prophecy was still valid, and that the other child of Prophecy would be going to the Ministry for special training. Tom's ego and hubris would handle the rest.

Smiling happily, Albus Dumbledore exited Number Twelve, Grimmauld Place and spun on the spot, Apparating to the front gates of Hogwarts Castle. Things were going well, proving the old axiom about perseverance winning against all odds. Or something like that.

2: Flight

Groaning, Harry reached up quickly and banged off the alarm before it could get started. He had long experience with this. It would not do to wake up his uncle.

Lying back on his threadbare pillow, Harry sighed as he felt the weight of all his problems fall back on him. He had managed to escape, however briefly, into the abyss of sleep, but now, in the greyish light of predawn, everything came rushing back. Nobody wanted anything to do with him. He was of no value to anyone,

except as a weapon. He had only one true friend, and he wasn't even human.

Rolling over and sighing, Harry got up and put on his clothes. It was time to put the second stage of his plan into action. He had spent the time on the Hogwarts Express thinking of little else but his escape, and he figured he had just about every facet of the plan covered. He had outlined the basics to Dobby last night after the elf's return, and he hoped Dobby remembered everything.

"Dobby?" he called.

A few seconds later, the excitable elf popped into the room, looking just as bouncy as ever despite the earliness of the hour. "Master Harry calls and Dobby answers, no matter the hour," Dobby said happily, as if picking up Harry's thought.

"Er, right. You ready for stage two?"

"Dobby is ready, Master Harry, sir.

"OK then. Let me just write the note and leave it on the kitchen table, and you can go head and shrink my trunk."

Nodding happily, Dobby set about packing clothes into the trunk, while Harry addressed a simple note to the Dursleys:

Petunia, Dudley, and Vernon:

I could go on and on about the horrid treatment I have received at your hands, but why bother? You, like the other people in my life, view me as dispensable and easily cast aside.

So, I have only three things to say to you all. One, I renounce any and all blood kin between myself and Petunia Evans Dursley and Dudley Dursley. Two, I no longer consider the property of Number Four Privet Drive my home, and never will. And finally, may we never see each other again, in this life or the next.

Signed,

Harry James Potter

"There, that's that," Harry said, folding up the sheet of regular paper. "You ready, Dobby?"

"Dobby is ready, Master Harry, sir," squeaked the elf, handing Harry a shrunken trunk. All his school books and magical paraphernalia were stacked off to one side; the only things remaining in his trunk were clothes, the photo album and the invisibility cloak.

And now it was time for the act Harry was least looking forward to. In spite of his fervent desire to be separated from the magical world forever, this final act would make it irrevocable and he felt a slight pang.

Taking a deep breath, he took his wand off the bedside table and stared at it. It was marked with fingerprints and a few stains, a small crack in the finish marred one end. This wand, the brother to the wand purchased by a young Tom Riddle all those years ago, had been his constant companion since his eleventh birthday. It had been with him when he'd faced Quirrell, when he'd faced the basilisk, it had helped cast the Patronus Charm, it had saved his life in the graveyard. Could he do it?

Looking inward, Harry examined himself; and came to the realization that he could, in fact, do it. With another deep breath, he snapped the wand.

It went with a very mundane cracking sound. No sparks, no sound of a phoenix crying. Just a dull crack. The phoenix feather fell out, splintered as well. The brother to Voldemort's wand was now useless.

Gently, Harry set the fragments of his wand on top of his school books and turned away. It's all your fault, Dumbledore, he thought bitterly. No matter though. You'll get what you deserve in the end; tyrants always do.

"Let's go, Dobby," Harry said quietly.

Taking the elf's hand, Harry Potter left Number Four Privet Drive for the last time and embarked on his new life. He didn't know what he was heading toward, but it had to be better than what he was leaving behind.

With a faint pop, Harry and Dobby appeared deep in the bowels of Gringotts. The goblin known as Griphook was there waiting for them.

"Good morning, Mr. Potter. May your gold flow and your enemies tremble, Griphook greeted them, showing far too many teeth."

"Yours as well, Senior Teller Griphook. I trust all is ready?"

Griphook nodded brusquely and ushered the human and house-elf out the door of the receiving chamber toward his office. At this early hour, only a handful of goblins were out and about. The bank slowed but did not stop at night. Time was Galleons, after all, and Gringotts remained open twenty-four hours a day, at least to one of their top depositors.

Griphook opened a polished oak door and motioned Harry into the office. Dobby waited outside, making sure nobody disturbed his master.

Harry entered, and, seating himself in front of the desk, politely declined the obligatory offer of tea and biscuits.

Griphook thumbed through an impressively thick ledger on top of the desk and peered beadily at Harry.

"Now, Mr. Potter, The papers you requested are prepared, and the final purchase of your house should be finalized by the time we complete our business here today. With the execution of the last will and testament of one Sirius Orion Black, you may gain emancipation in both worlds. Do you wish to proceed with this course of action?"

Harry leaned back and thought carefully. At first, when he was hatching up his escape scheme, he had thought about going to America or perhaps the continent. However, that presented a number of problems. Much as he wanted to remove himself totally from the magical world, it just wasn't feasible. He would, at the very least, have to keep his accounts at Gringotts. The Potter fortune was considerable and, if it were to be removed from the wizarding economy, it could cause problems which would bring unwanted attention on to him.

As a result, if he were to go to America, he would have to settle near one of the wizarding enclaves there. And all anybody wanting to

track him down would have to do is look at English speaking countries, figure out that it was the U.S. he went to by process of elimination, and ask around at the various enclaves if any new immigrants with a British accent had shown up recently. There just weren't that many wizarding settlements in the world to lose himself in. The United States of America was an enormous country, but there weren't that many wizarding settlements, at least by comparison to Britain. Most wizards hid in the large cities in the US, where oddities were least likely to be noticed. But they still tended to congregate together and keep tabs on who went where. So a stranger appearing with a British accent would be remarked upon.

There was always the option of withdrawing a large amount of cash, opening up a regular checking account, and trying to get a job, but then he would have to answer a whole bunch of questions he really didn't want to. Like, 'where the hell have you been for the past five years?' This would result in a high level of scrutiny on him, which would raise quite a few official eyebrows. And Harry wouldn't put it past Dumbledore to have a few contacts in the Muggle world. The fact that his malnourished state had gone unnoticed for the first eleven years of his life supported that. Besides, Harry really had enough of hard work courtesy of the Dursleys to last him a lifetime. He wasn't willing to work anymore ... not when he had a large fortune at hand that was his by right.

So, in short, He couldn't go to the United States or any other country and he couldn't go complete Muggle. What to do, what to do?

It was then that the idea hit him. Hide in plain sight, of course. When he had sent Dobby off to Gringotts, he had instructed him to ask if there were any houses for sale in or around Hogsmeade. As it turned out, there was, and Harry would move in today.

"Yes, Senior Teller Griphook. Can we have the reading of those parts of the will of Sirius which pertain to me now and the public reading later?"

"Certainly, Mr. Potter. Would you like me to summarize or would you like for me to read the document?"

"Summarize now, read it later."

Griphook nodded and thumbed through the ledger again. "Basically, you gain most of the Black fortune with the exception of a few bequests, and all properties save Number Twelve Grimmauld Place, which goes to a Mr. Remus Lupin. Upon your acceptance you may also assume the title of Lord Black, and then, by default, that of Lord Potter, since by accepting one you automatically become eligible for the other."

Harry nodded and thought carefully. "Do I need to take these titles now? As I understand it, once a new house lordship is accepted it is automatically entered into the record book at the Ministry. I want to avoid notice for now."

Griphook grinned, showing a few too many teeth again. "No, Mr. Potter. You do not have to take the titles just yet. Just sign the papers and you will have access to your bequests." And with that, he hauled an enormous pile of parchment out of a drawer, still grinning maniacally. Damn goblins... thought Harry resignedly as he eyed the mound of paperwork presented to him, They tortured humans with their reams and reams of paperwork instead of their swords and axes now.

#

An hour later, Harry signed the last form, transferring all his assets to a single vault. Massaging his aching hand and glaring darkly at Griphook, who smirked, Harry said, "Is there anything else we need to take care of today?"

"No, I do not believe so, Mr. Potter." Griphook thumbed back through his ledger. "I believe we are finished ... and ah, yes. Your house is ready for you."

"Excellent... And the plastic surgeon?"

"You are scheduled for noon tomorrow," Griphook said, checking another page in the ledger. "The appropriate fee has already been transferred to the account."

"Great," said Harry, rising with alacrity, still nursing his aching hand. Taking the package of stuff the goblins had prepared for him, Harry bowed formally to Griphook, "Until next time, Griphook. May your enemies tremble."

Griphook stood as well and bowed slightly. "May your gold flow forever, Mr. Potter."

Harry opened the door and smiled at Dobby. "We're done, Dobby, Ready to go?"

"Dobby is always ready to serve, Master Harry, Sir," the elf squeaked.

"None of that, I told you, just call me Harry."

Dobby attempted to run at the wall, but remembered his orders not to punish himself just in time. He dithered on the spot, looking rather comical.

Harry laughed. "Come on, Dobby. We have a new house to check out."

"Yes M- I mean Harry, sir. Dobby is ready to go."

"Hang on a tick..." Harry pulled a small ring intricately carved with runes that the goblins had lent him, for a small fee, and slipped it on his finger. He felt his hair lengthen and his facial shape change slightly. Turning to examine his face in the polished side of a broadsword on the wall, Harry saw a blond-haired blue-eyed surfer type staring back. Totally not Harry Potter, he thought happily, turning the invisible ring on his finger. This would do until he could get real plastic surgery to remove the faint outlines of the trademark scar on his forehead, and get coloured contacts. Without the scar and the glasses, he would be almost unrecognizable as Harry Potter.

"OK, Dobby my friend, let's go to our new house," Harry said, taking the elf's hand.

With a snap of his fingers, elf and boy popped off to Hogsmeade. The goblin known as Griphook stared after them from his office door, mystified. "Strangest wizard I've ever met," he muttered to himself, before shrugging and heading back into his office to make more money from the Potter/Black fortunes.

The house wasn't at all remarkable, Harry thought as he and Dobby appeared in the front yard. It was a small three room cottage, slightly

smaller than the Dursleys' house, but possessing a homey quality that the house on Privet Drive lacked. There were a couple of leafy trees in the front yard, which was slightly overgrown and brown. Flowers and shrubs lined a crazy-paved path up to the front door. All the greenery needed some weeding and general care, but this was something Harry was good at, due to all his Herbology lessons, not to mention all the time he spent weeding the Dursleys' garden.

"Not bad, eh, Dobby?" Harry inquired as he headed up the path to the house.

"This place is needing lots of work, Master Harry, sir," Dobby responded firmly, popping ahead of Harry and opening the door.

The house was completely empty and dusty, but otherwise in pretty good shape. The front door opened into the living room, which had a few big windows on one wall and some built-in bookcases. The front door was fitted with a mullioned window. There were no carpets and the hardwood floor gleamed dully under the thin coating of dust, which Dobby was eyeing with disdain.

Clasping his hands behind his back, Harry strolled into the small hallway off the living room. On one side were two bedrooms, roughly the same size, across from which was the bathroom. At the far end of the hall was the master suite, which had its own bath and two windows, fitted with window seats. I'll need to find some furniture, Harry mused as he turned in a slow circle in the master bedroom. Good thing Dobby's here, I don't fancy hauling furniture all by myself.

Turning and heading off in the opposite direction, Harry found a large country kitchen fitted with granite counter tops and lots of cupboards. A small door led to a pantry, which had another door leading out to the back yard, which also needed a trim. A small outbuilding in the back yard was fitted with potions equipment.

"Yeah, the goblins did a nice job finding this little place," Harry muttered to himself, laughing as Dobby started cleaning.

A flutter of wings interrupted his reverie, and Hedwig settled gently on his shoulder, nipping his ear amiably and barking.

"You're such a smart owl, aren't you?" Harry cooed to his friend, scratching her belly. "You can always find me, can't you?"

Hedwig preened and nodded. She was glad to see that her wizard was feeling better today, not feeling so weighed down. And this place was much nicer than the old one, nobody shouting at her or trying to lock her up.

Harry petted and played with his owl for a bit, before heading inside to begin unpacking his trunk. He would have to go shopping today, for lots of things. Glancing at his new watch, he saw it was about nine o'clock. His letter should be winging its way all over the country. In spite of himself, he grinned, imagining all the various reactions. Dumbledore would be furious, Voldemort would be lethal, and his friends-

Harry abruptly cut off that thought. He was feeling good this morning, no need to ruin it with thoughts of those backstabbing hypocrites. It was time to embark on a path of his own, one that didn't involve dancing to someone else's tune.

Smiling, Harry got out a Muggle pen and paper and set about making lists of household supplies, while Dobby dusted happily in the other room.

#

A few hours later, Harry and Dobby returned with a number of shrunken packages which contained furniture and linens and dishes, all the things necessary to make a house a home. Who knew Dobby was a shopping fetishist? Using elf magic, Dobby had put on a glamour that made him look like another blond surfer type, and dragged Harry from store to store all over Edinburgh, spending his money like water. Harry's feet ached abominably.

"Dobby, you are evil, and you should be destroyed for the good of all humanity," Harry groaned, flopping down on the floor in a litter of tiny boxes.

Dobby cackled and rubbed his hands in glee, having returned to his elf form. "Master Harry did not enjoy the shopping?" he asked innocently.

Harry groaned again. "Remind me never to introduce you to the home shopping network," he muttered, rising painfully to his feet and passing Dobby the boxes to un-shrink.

Before long, the house was fully outfitted with tasteful leather furniture and throw rugs over the shiny floors. A four-piece dining room set sat in one corner, dishes were stacked in the cabinet and linens put away in the closets. The only thing missing was food, which could not be shrunken as it tended to become rather mushy and tasteless.

As Harry was standing in the pantry, fitting it with shelves, a fat gray rat scuttled through, heading for the outside. He made a mental note to set up pest control wards as quickly as possible, and was just thinking of ways to do it, when his brain stopped dead, hit by a sudden realization.

Wormtail...

He had made a note in his letter to the Daily Prophet, asking about how Wormtail had gone so long without being discovered, when the Weasley twins had the Marauder's Map. At the time, he had just figured that, being one of the map's creators, Wormtail knew a way to hide his presence on the map, which undoubtedly made sense. Either that or the sheer number of dots on the map hid him, like hiding a single grain of sand on a beach. Wormtail was supposed to be dead, after all, so who would think to look for him?

But...

But Wormtail had been with the Weasleys for years and years. Were they in on the secret of Wormtail's real identity? Ron had fought awfully hard when Sirius and Remus had been about to reveal Scabbers as Peter Pettigrew, hadn't he? It was almost inconceivable that Pettigrew had remained a rat all that time, wasn't it? Surely he had transformed at least once.

The man was no idiot. He had managed an Animagus transformation in fifth year, faked his death rather well and managed to hide for thirteen years. Harry would be the first to admit that wizards weren't good at spotting things right under their nose, but he frankly found it extremely hard to believe that somebody wasn't in on

the secret. Rats just didn't live for twelve years. Were Arthur and Molly in on Peter's identity?

The idea frankly gave him chills.

And then there was Remus. Quite convenient that he just happened to show up on the same night Sirius and Peter were together, despite having the map for months. Remus didn't contact Harry at all for the first thirteen years of his life, despite being such a great friend to his parents, and then conveniently showed up the same year Sirius escaped, and just happened to turn up and insist that he be tied to Pettigrew on the full moon, allowing him to escape. Very fishy indeed...

Climbing slowly off the stool, his face flushed as the frantic thoughts raced through his mind, Harry jogged back into the kitchen, breathing hard. If even half of his wild thoughts were true, it revealed a betrayal far greater than even he realized. For if the Weasleys were in on Peter's identity, and if Remus was also in on it, it meant that they all worked for Voldemort in some capacity or other, knowingly or not.

Now, there was one final question. What should he do with this information?

His Gryffindor side told him to go charging up to Grimmauld Place and yell and scream at them, which would lead to getting hit with a stunner and force-fed Liquid Imperius to do Albus Dumbledore's bidding, never to see the light of day again except to be Dumbledore's pet Dark Lord Destroyer. No, not a desirable outcome ... not at all...

His Slytherin side was what he had been using recently, however, and it was this side which prevailed. An absolutely evil grin spread across Harry's face as a plan sprang to mind, full blown. Maybe they didn't deserve what was about to happen to them, but maybe they did. In any case, it was time to set into motion the revelation of his betrayers. After all, as the Yanks would say, turnabout is fair play!

3: Capture

Amelia Bones sighed, rubbing her temples and stared blankly at the wall. How the hell had this day gone so bad?

Ever since Harry Potter's letter had appeared in the Prophet this morning, the Ministry had been buzzing like a beehive poked with a sharp stick. Cornelius Fudge had tried to push through a Wizengamot edict to arrest Potter for treason, which Bones had quite neatly shut down. It wasn't a crime to print letters in the paper, for Merlin's sake. A vote of No Confidence had then immediately been called for and passed, removing Fudge from office. Bones had been quietly conducting an investigation all year into Fudge's nefarious dealings and had presented the evidence in front of the Wizengamot. Fudge was now awaiting shipment to Azkaban in a holding cell, and she, Amelia, was interim Minister for Magic. It had been one wild ride of a day, and it wasn't over yet.

Amelia's reverie was interrupted by a knock at the office door.

"Enter," she called irritably.

The heart-shaped face and pink hair of Nymphadora Tonks peered around the door frame. "You wanted to see me, Director?"

"Come in, Auror," Bones said frostily.

Tonks stepped in, eyeing the director warily.

"Where do your loyalties lie these days, Tonks," Bones inquired.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I'm wondering where your loyalties lie. On one hand, you're one of our most promising Aurors. But on the other, you're part of an illegal group set up by Albus Dumbledore, the main goal of which appears to be to keep Harry Potter oppressed."

"I assure you, director, there is no conflict between my work and outside activities," Tonks said coldly.

"Auror, you know better than that. You kept a child locked up in that abusive house of his all last summer, trespassed on Ministry property all through the year, and did Merlin knows what else. Albus Dumbledore is now wanted for questioning with regards to his activities at that school of his and his handling of Harry Potter."

Bones stopped and took a breath, before fixing the squirming Auror with her best 'you better give me a straight answer or else' look. "Again, Auror Tonks, I ask you. Where do your loyalties lie? Do you work for Albus Dumbledore or for us?"

There was a pause. "I'm an Auror first and foremost, Director. I joined Dumbledore's group because I wanted to fight Voldemort and I thought he was the only option. I mean, it's Albus Dumbledore, if you can't trust him, who can you trust?"

"And now, Auror?"

Tonks fidgeted. "Well, I read Harry's letter ... I had no idea any of this was going on. I mean, I knew he didn't have an ideal home life, but I didn't know it was that bad."

Bones nodded. "I can understand where you're coming from, Tonks. Can I trust you, then, to join the search for Mr. Dumbledore, to get him to answer a few questions, and to provide me any relevant information you might glean from any Order meetings?"

"Absolutely, Director. I think I may have some ideas on getting him here, if he calls another Order meeting."

Bones cracked her first smile of the interview. "Excellent, Auror Tonks. You are dismissed."

Before Tonks could leave, a snow white owl flew in through the partially open door. "How the hell did that owl get in here?" Bones muttered, as the owl alighted smugly on her desk, holding out a leg. "I have very powerful mail redirection wards."

"That's Harry Potter's owl, Director," Tonks said, laughing quietly. "She's a very smart bird."

"I'll say," Bones replied, untying the scroll. The owl hooted and flew back out the open door, and Bones could've sworn it smirked at her on the way.

Unfurling the scroll, Bones eyebrows rose higher and higher and she didn't even notice when her monocle fell out to smack her in the chest.

Dear Madam Bones:

We have never corresponded, but we have met, in that farce of a trial last year. Yes, I am Harry Potter, and I am writing you, in your capacity as director of Magical Law Enforcement, with some information on a possible criminal conspiracy.

If you have read my letter in the Prophet this morning, you know that Peter Pettigrew has been hiding out as a rat Animagus for years and years, only being discovered in my third year by Sirius Black and Remus Lupin. Mr. Pettigrew then proceeded to escape and resurrect Voldemort at the end of my fourth year. But, I have some questions that need answering, upon further reflection.

I find it very hard to believe that a wizard, no matter how cowardly, would be satisfied with hiding out as a rat for thirteen years. Therefore, if we follow this line of reasoning to the bitter end, somebody was in on his identity, and since he lived with the Weasleys for all that time, it had to be at least one of them. I find it very convenient that no testing was ever done on such a long-living rat, they just accepted it. But, what if they didn't? Suppose Arthur and Molly knew it was Peter Pettigrew? Very neat how Pettigrew was given to Ronald the same day he met me, during the same school year in which Voldemort was trying to get his body back, hmmm? And, when Scabbers the rat was about to be found out as Peter Pettigrew, Ronald fought very hard to stop this from happening. Interesting, isn't it?

Then there is Remus Lupin. It is well known that Voldemort was making overtures to the werewolves back in the first war. Mr. Lupin and those like him have long been shunned and cast aside, even lower than the dirt on the average wizard's shoes. He knew Peter Pettigrew as a rat Animagus, yet did not tell anyone this fact when it was thought that my godfather had killed him, leaving behind a single finger. Even the most powerful explosion hex would leave behind more than that; not even his robe was found.

Even when he came to teach at Hogwarts, Mr. Lupin never told Dumbledore that Black or Pettigrew were Animagi. While Remus might not be working directly for Voldemort, I still find the circumstances rather suspicious.

The Weasleys might not be working for Voldemort either. He did kill Molly's brothers Gideon and Fabian after all, but again, there have been many families that had some members supporting the Dark Lord while the rest opposed him-my godfather was a prime example of this, he was against Voldemort while his family supported him. Could not the same be said of Molly Prewitt and her family? Thus I feel that this deserves some investigation.

With hope that you will act upon this information and take these possible criminals into custody, I remain your servant,

Harry James Potter

Amelia lowered the letter with shaking hands. This couldn't possibly be accurate, could it? Yet she would be neglecting her duty if she didn't follow up on this, even if she wasn't technically the head of DMLE anymore.

"Director?" Amelia had almost forgotten that Tonks was there.

"I just received some interesting information, Auror," Amelia said. "It seems that Mr. Potter has suspicions that the Weasleys knew that Peter Pettigrew was hiding among them as a rat."

Tonks gasped. "No, that can't be accurate. They're the most light-oriented family out there!"

"Nevertheless, this does require looking in to. I want you to take a team and bring Arthur, Molly, Ronald and Ginevra back for questioning."

Tonks was still shocked. This wasn't right. But as she turned the circumstances over in her mind, she could sort of see where Harry might think that the Weasleys were hiding Pettigrew. "Very well, I'll take care of it," she said, rising. "Will there be anything else?"

"No, Auror Tonks. You are dismissed."

Tonks turned, tripping over her chair and barely saving herself from a nasty fall before heading out the door, her face and hair turning red in embarrassment. Being a Metamorphmagus sucked sometimes.

Reaching into her attached belt pouch, Tonks fished around until she found the parchment with the secret on it. Since Grimmauld Place was under Fidelius, all the Order members had to be told the secret by Dumbledore. Lucky that Tonks saved her scrap of parchment.

It was time to round up a basic six-man arrest team. She really hoped Harry was wrong about his theory though. The poor kid just never seemed to catch a break.

#

Molly Weasley was baking. After Apparating to Ottery St. Catchpole and seeing the complete and utter destruction of her home, with Bill and Percy inside, she had broken down on Arthur's shoulder. Her babies ... both dead, and they and Percy barely reconciled.

Now, she was at Twelve Grimmauld Place, baking in order to take her mind off things. Ron and Ginny were upstairs with the other Ministry five. Those poor children ... they shouldn't even be involved. Arthur was sitting at the table staring into space. Nobody else was here, off looking for Harry, the poor boy.

Just then, Tonks and a few Aurors appeared at the top of the stairs. Before Molly could react, she was told that she was wanted for questioning by the Department of Magical Law Enforcement.

"What is the meaning of this?" Molly said, hands on hips.

"You, your husband, your son Ronald and your daughter Ginevra are wanted for questioning regarding Peter Pettigrew," one of the Aurors repeated patiently.

"We had nothing to do with that...that man!" Molly said, her voice rising. "And I resent any implication that we did!"

The Aurors looked unperturbed. "Nevertheless, you are wanted for questioning. Please come with us or we will be forced to stun you."

Molly huffed and turned off the hob. Arthur hadn't said a word, but allowed magic suppression manacles to be put on. After much spluttering, they cuffed Molly as well, before two Aurors split off to collect Ron and Ginny.

"This is all Potter's fault!" roared Ron as he was forced at wandpoint down the stairs. "I know he put you up to this."

The Aurors didn't answer and just slapped cuffs on them and activated a portkey. Fifteen minutes later, four Weasleys were in separate holding cells. It was probably a first.

Meanwhile, another team of Aurors had apprehended Remus Lupin, who was in a silver lined cell on the same level as the Department of Mysteries. All Remus could think as the door clanged shut was: it's all over now.

ter 3: Endgame

A/N: I know nothing about plastic surgery, so I made it up. Because I'm lazy. Also, I changed my mind; there will be a pairing. But as the author, and thus as God, I have the right to do that. Now, bow to me.
Snicker

1: The Chamber of Secrets Reopened

2 July, 1996

Harry stood up from his rather ungraceful landing and stared around the dim chamber. He didn't think he'd ever be back here again, after his second year. His time here was limited as he had to visit the plastic surgeon, but he figured he could get what he needed to do over with pretty fast.

After sending the letter to Madam Bones, Harry and Dobby had gone food shopping, spending more money like crazy. Then, while eating his solitary dinner, Harry had settled down to do some serious thinking.

Now that things had settled down, he realized what a gamble sending that letter to Voldemort had been. Voldemort really had no reason to stop hunting him; in fact, he had every reason to blithely ignore Harry's letter and kill him for sending it. Harry's numerous escapes, one right in front of his Death Eaters; the prophecy; the fact that Harry snatched him out of his body; the fact that Harry had gotten the Philosopher's Stone away from him in first year. No matter that all those encounters were setups, either by Voldemort or Dumbledore or both, the fact was that Harry had made Voldemort look foolish or weak, and Voldemort's personality wouldn't allow for that to go on. How could you be a terrible fearful dark lord if a mere schoolchild kept escaping you time and time again?

So yes, Voldemort sending a signed contract was rather too convenient for Harry's liking. Was he up to something? Did he perhaps have a way to shelter him from any fallout a breach in the contract might entail? Did he perhaps get somebody else to sign using his name? Contrary to what Dumbledore had said, there was no way for anyone to forcibly enter anyone into a binding magical contract against their will. Even if you signed somebody's name on it,

it wouldn't take effect. Funny thing-all the books on magical contracts suddenly reappeared after the Triwizard Tournament...

Maybe he was hoping to trick Harry into violating the contract somehow, thus rendering his enemy a squib. Harry just didn't know, and it bugged him a bit.

Harry had no answers and vowed to quit worrying about it. He couldn't worry about what he couldn't change. If Voldemort wanted him dead, it didn't really matter. There wasn't much he, Harry, could do in a straight up fight; he just didn't have the knowledge. He would take it one day at a time.

Thinking about Voldemort's seeming acquiescence had brought him to another point: the snapping of his wand. While it had seemed a good idea at the time, Harry wasn't sure doing that was the best thing he could've done. Deciding that he would need to stay in the magical world, at least peripherally, had made him realize it further; he would need a wand, even if he didn't use it all the time. Even if he didn't intend to fight Voldemort, having a tool didn't mean you had to use it.

But he still didn't really want that wand. After signing the contract, he had felt no warmth from it anyway; it no longer worked for him. So he would've had to get a new one, no matter what. But it would have been fun to be a fly on the wall at the Order meeting where his snapped wand was showcased. He would've loved to see the expression on Dumbledore's face.

Having decided that he needed a wand, it then remained to see how he would get it. He couldn't go to Ollivander; Harry would be willing to bet every Galleon in his vault that as soon as Voldemort's brother wand had been sold, the crazy wandmaker had instantly owed Dumbledore to tell him about it. Dumbledore had admitted to that after all. And if Harry Potter came in needing a new one, the same thing would happen. What to do, what to do?

There might be a wand shop in Knockturn Alley, but it was stupid to wander in there without knowing where you were going. Many of the stores and stalls down there weren't marked at all. If you didn't know where you needed to go, you didn't belong there. Knockturn Alley was just that kind of place. Although, come to think of it, Dobby

might know; after all, he had been the house-elf of the Malfoys and they had no doubt visited the dingy alleyway many times.

Harry waffled on the Knockturn Alley idea for a while during dinner, but thought better of it. Even if it was less public than Diagon Alley, underworld types still babbled to each other, and if Harry Potter was seen, it would be big news. Given that Mundungus Fletcher was in the order, Harry had no doubt Dumbledore had contacts in the shadier parts of the wizarding world through Fletcher and others like him. Perhaps after his plastic surgery to remove the scar, and perhaps a dye job and crew cut, he would go down there.

It was then that he had a brain wave; the basilisk sitting down in the Chamber of Secrets. From some of his research, Harry knew basilisk parts could be used in potions, armour and of course, wands. If he could go down and harvest the fangs, he could supply them as wand cores, since he had a volatile mixture of phoenix tears and basilisk venom (from the same snake no less) in his blood. The wand would hopefully be an excellent fit. Although, since he wasn't a wandmaker, he was only speculating.

So, here he was, with a few charmed knives Dobby had gotten this morning, while the excitable little elf himself bounced along behind him with a few crates. This was going to be messy.

Indeed it was. The place was just as creepy and dank as Harry remembered. Water oozed into stagnant puddles on the floor, making a hollow plonking sound. The snake statues were covered with lichens, giving the whole place the feel of the inside of a wet, mouldy piece of bread. Salazar Slytherin sure knew how to show people a good time, Harry thought grumpily as his socks got wet.

The basilisk looked roughly the same as it had when he'd last seen it; it might've only died an hour ago. Not having really stopped to look at it before, Harry marvelled at it. Sixty feet long from nose to tail, nearly five feet thick, it lay on the floor of the chamber looking like the world's ugliest and biggest garden hose.

I fought that thing when I was twelve? How foolishly Gryffindor I was. And, I saved a Weasley, Harry sneered at himself. Why the hell didn't I just throw the diary at the snake's mouth instead of nearly killing myself on it?

Shaking off his self-castigating thoughts, Harry debated for a moment. All he really needed here was a couple of fangs. He could bring the goblins back down here to harvest the rest of it. Providing the goblins with a source of thousands and thousands of Galleons could only win him points. Not to mention save him from getting all dirty and bloody for nothing.

"Change of plan, Dobby," Harry said, his voice echoing hollowly in the vast space. "I'm only going to collect a couple of fangs then we're going to the surgeon."

"Whatever Master Harry wants," Dobby squeaked from behind him.

Harry looked around for the fang that had stuck into his arm when he was last down here, but didn't spot it anywhere. Maybe Rabid Fangirl Number One, AKA Ginevra Weasley, took it as a keepsake. He didn't remember seeing her with it, but he was hardly in a state to be Mr. Observant at the time.

Shrugging, Harry removed a charmed knife and, carefully, oh so carefully, extracted a few fangs. They made wet sticky sounds, like plucking the bones out of a chicken, and the stench of the basilisk's mouth was horrendous. The fangs were gigantic, nearly as long as his forearm. Harry carefully set them in one of Dobby's crates. "OK, Dobby, can you clean this crap off me?"

Dobby snapped his fingers and most of the muck came off Harry's shirt. "I guess even basilisk spit is magic resistant," Harry griped, before gingerly taking Dobby's hand and allowing the elf to pop them out of there.

Arriving back at the house at the outskirts of Hogsmeade, Harry immediately took off his shirt and dashed into the bathroom. He needed to get this junk off.

After nearly half an hour of frantic scrubbing, the green blood was finally off his hands and forearms. It was a good thing too; it had eaten straight through his protective dragon hide gloves. How the hell do people harvest these things, Harry thought to himself, after stepping out of the shower. I liked that damn shirt too, sigh.

Now I know I've spent too much time by myself, if I'm thinking the word sigh instead of sighing.

Snorting, Harry left the bathroom, and put on his new suit. It was time to visit the plastic surgeon, to remove the last vestiges of Harry Potter.

#

Three hours later found Harry back at his house, a small bandage over his forehead where the scar had once been. Removing it had been pretty simple; remove a small patch of skin from his left forearm, cut out the scar on his forehead and graft the new skin onto it. A simple salve from the apothecary would re-grow the skin on both areas, leaving no marks.

Both areas stung a bit, rather like a scrape on a knee, but nothing too terrible. The worst part was the smell of the cream, it reminded him of wet socks and stale tomato sauce that had been sitting in the sun for a while.

"Dobby, do you have the salve?"

"Right here, Master Harry, sir," Dobby answered, bouncing into view with a small jar.

Harry gingerly peeled off the bandages and opened the jar, rubbing the noxious-smelling cream into the raw looking scabs. A cool, soothing feeling spread through the areas and new skin began to grow.

"Ah, that's better," Harry sighed, leaning back into his chair and doing his best to ignore the wreaking cream.. It had been a long tiring day, and Harry felt himself dozing off. There was time enough to take care of the rest of the cosmetic things tomorrow.

#

Harry awoke the next morning feeling much better. The salve had done its magic and he couldn't feel a thing.

Wandering into the bathroom, yawning and scratching, Harry checked himself out in the mirror. A large grin spread across his face. There was absolutely no evidence at all that a scar had once marred his pristine forehead. This meant he could cut his hair short

and get rid of his fringe at last. And after getting those contacts later today, he could go anywhere and not be recognized, without a glamour charm.

"I'm free!" he hollered joyfully, bouncing in his excitement. "Free!"

Perhaps his reaction was a little extreme, but Harry had always been defined by his scar, rather than who he was, and he was glad to get rid of it. It felt like a huge burden had been removed with the flick of the surgeon's knife. Now he could be whatever he wanted, free of any expectations.

After showering, Harry sauntered downstairs, light of heart and step, to find Dobby busily humming and cooking breakfast. "Good morning, Dobby," Harry said, sliding up to the cable and pouring coffee.

"Good morning, Master Harry, Sir," Dobby said, magicking a plate of eggs and bacon and toast in front of him. "Did Master Harry sleep well?"

"Like a rock," Harry replied around a mouthful of eggs. "Listen, Dobby, do you know Knockturn Alley pretty well?"

Dobby's ears drooped a little. "Dobby is knowing it, Sir, from bad masters. Master Harry should not be going there, Sir."

"I agree," Harry said. "But I need to go there to have a new wand fashioned. Even if I didn't snap it, my old one didn't work for me anymore."

"Dobby understands. There is being a shop that is selling custom wands. Dobby's old master was buying one for young Master Draco to be studying with out of school."

"Do you know where it is?"

Dobby nodded eagerly. "Dobby can be showing you, Sir."

Just then, an owl tapped at the window. Hedwig glared at it from atop the cupboard and turned her back, giving a distinctly huffing sound. Owls, especially Hedwig, were rather territorial.

"What's this now?" Harry muttered, opening the window and allowing the arrogant looking owl to fly in. Unfurling the scroll attached to its leg, Harry fed the owl a slice of bacon before it hooted once and flew out the window.

Mr. Potter:

I received your letter yesterday, and we have taken the appropriate actions. Arthur, Molly, Ronald and Ginevra Weasley, along with Remus Lupin are all currently in custody of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Questioning will take place this afternoon, the third of July, in Courtroom Ten. The allegations you have made are serious enough that a full meeting of the Wizengamot has been called.

Incidentally, I do not know if you have heard, but Cornelius Fudge has been removed from office. I have been voted to take his place as Interim Minister, and Gawain Robards is now head of DMLE. He is quite a capable administrator, and has my full confidence in his new office. Any further information on this or any related legal questions may be addressed to him.

With hopes of seeing you this afternoon,

Amelia Susan Bones

Interim Minister for Magic

Huh, Harry thought, folding the scroll back up. Well, she always did have a thing for justice. Harry was surprised, though, that his letter had been acted upon so promptly. Maybe not everyone in the Ministry was corrupt.

He decided to attend the trial. He wanted to know if he was right about the Weasleys and Remus being complicit in the hiding of Pettigrew. Even though he had thought of this only last night, he still found it hard to believe. But with everyone turning on him, it wasn't hard to imagine that he would be thinking about things a little more closely, spotting inconsistencies and incongruities in the various stories he had been told.

But perhaps going to the hearing would be a mistake. Dumbledore was sure to be present and itching like mad to get him back under his

crooked nose. But he wouldn't dare try anything in the middle of the Wizengamot, would he? Would he? Was he that desperate?

Wild schemes for getting Dumbledore out of his hair began to fire off in his mind. Perhaps he could send another letter to the Daily Prophet (boy, he sure was getting really into letters, wasn't he?) insinuating that due to the more than usual interest Dumbledore took in his life that maybe he, Dumbledore, had a thing for young boys. Harry's snickered to himself. That would sure be hilarious. Yeah, he thought idly, and maybe Draco Malfoy is secretly a Veela and lusting after me all this time. And Voldemort's attempts at killing me were merely suppressed sexual tension. He felt the bile rise in his throat as his mind sent up a creepy image-that snake like face, lowering down to kiss him with its nonexistent lips...

Shuddering horribly, Harry banished those images from his mind. Bad, very baaaad! Don't go there!

Proving that he was a Gryffindor, Harry decided to go to the hearing, consequences be damned. He really wanted to know if he was correct about the Weasleys knowingly sheltering Pettigrew. And about Remus and where his true loyalties lay.

2: The Hearing

3 July, 1996

Severus Snape Apparated with a soft pop to the Ministry atrium. Stalking quickly to his assigned spot, he sneered at a couple of passing flunkies, who ran in terror. Snape smirked and set up a Disillusionment field next to the lifts. Leaning back against the wall, he crossed his arms and waited.

Dumbledore had stuck him with this sad duty: Potter catching. As if Snape didn't have anything better to do today, than stand here watching for one attention seeking brat. Besides, Potter wouldn't be so stupid as to come here, when he knew that Dumbledore was looking for him. Even the Gryffindor golden boy wasn't that dumb, right?

Although Snape wouldn't be surprised if he was; Potter had a great knack for sticking his nose into situations where it shouldn't be, he

thought with a sneer. Nevertheless, even he wouldn't be dumb enough to come strolling in here-

Snape's left eyebrow rose. Well, well, well, looks like I was wrong, he thought. He almost didn't recognize the blond boy walking confidently through the Ministry. If it wasn't for the fact that he had spent a great deal of time observing Potter over the past five years, he wouldn't have recognized him at all. The only thing that gave him away was the fact that his left foot did a peculiar twitching motion on every alternate step and the distinctive scar on his left arm from the Horntail last year.

Well, well, well, Mr. Potter. We are in trouble, thought Snape gleefully.

Checking carefully to ensure nobody was watching, Snape sent a stunner quickly followed by a summoning charm. When Potter's body arrived, Snape marvelled at it for a moment. No scar, no glasses, brown eyes. What a change. Then he shook himself and slapped a portkey on him and watched as he disappeared in a bright flash of colour.

#

Meanwhile, back down in Courtroom Ten, Arthur, Molly, Ginevra and Ronald Weasley had been set up in chained chairs with one-way silencing charms placed around them. Sound could come in, but no sound would leave the boxes. The silencing charm would be removed only one chair at a time to avoid the defendants influencing each other's testimony. The members of the Wizengamot had filed up to the benches at the front of the room, minus Amelia Bones, who had been called away to deal with an unexpected American delegation. The buzz of conversation died out as a man with a lion-like mop of hair settled at the central seat. Off to one side, an elegant looking man in dark blue robes sat at a table with a dragon hide briefcase, looking attentively up at the Wizengamot over steepled fingers.

"Now that we all present, let us begin," the wild haired man said, settling a sheaf of parchment in front of him, "Interrogatory hearing on the third of July, into questions regarding the possible harbouring of a dangerous fugitive, one Peter Augustus Pettigrew, by Arthur Weasley and Molly Prewett Weasley. Interrogators, Rufus

Scrimgeour, head of the Aurors, and Gawain Robards, head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Council for the defence; Samuel L. Hall, of Hall, Hall, and Diggle ... Court scribe, Penelope Clearwater."

There was a pause as the scribe finished and turned over a new page of parchment.

Scrimgeour beckoned and a man in sombre gray robes stepped forward. "Remove the silencing charm from Arthur Weasley."

With a flick of his wand, the charm was dropped. Scrimgeour stared unblinkingly at Arthur, who stared confusedly back.

"Your name is Arthur Jonathan Weasley, of Ottery St. Catchpole?"

"Yes."

"You understand why you are here?"

"Not really, but I am eager to help," Arthur answered, attempting an ingratiating smile. Nobody smiled back.

"You are here," answered Scrimgeour, "because questions have been raised as to why you allowed an Animagus masquerading as a man to dwell in your home for thirteen years. We find that very suspicious, and we have decided to investigate the matter."

There was a pause as Arthur looked flabbergasted, but before he could say anything, Robards spoke up. He was an austere looking man with tiny spectacles perched on a thin blade of a nose. "Let us administer the Veritaserum now, if you please. I haven't got all day," he snapped.

Silently, the bailiff stalked forward and held up a tiny bottle. "Open wide, Weasley," he said, uncorking the bottle.

Arthur did so, still looking stunned. The bailiff administered the required three drops and stepped back to his shadowed corner.

There was a pause, while the potion took effect. Arthur's eyes glazed over slightly and he sagged in his chained chair.

"What is your name?" Robards asked.

"Arthur Jonathan Weasley," droned Arthur.

"Were you aware of the fact that the rat in your home was Peter Pettigrew?"

"Yes."

A murmur of voices broke out. Scrimgeour banged his gavel on the bench until silence reigned once more. "Were you ever a supporter of the wizard who styles himself Lord Voldemort?"

"Never."

"Who else was aware of the identity of the rat as Peter Pettigrew?"

"Just Molly and myself.."

More murmuring, which Scrimgeour didn't bother silencing this time, "No more questions," he said, nodding at Samuel Hall.

Hall rose from the table and ambled slowly to stand in front of the witness stand. He sent a sardonic glance at the gathered Wizengamot then turned to face Arthur.

"When did you first become aware of the identity of Peter Pettigrew?" he asked in a cultured voice.

"July of 1982," Arthur said in a monotone.

Hall's only reaction was a slight lifting of the eyebrow. This is what happens when you don't get to question the clients before hand, he thought grumpily. He had attended Cambridge Law School, unlike most of the pureblood solicitors out there. He had been trying forever, it seemed, to bring Muggle law practices to wizarding firms, but he wasn't getting anywhere.

Sighing inwardly, he brought his mind back to the questioning. "Please tell us of the circumstances in which you became aware of Pettigrew's identity."

"It was July of 1982," Arthur recited. "Molly had come downstairs to find a man in our kitchen, fallen asleep on the table. I was just behind her and stunned him. After tying him to a chair and removing his wand, I revived him. He told us that he was Peter Pettigrew and that he had managed to escape when Sirius Black blew up the street. He was afraid other Death Eaters might be looking for him, as a friend of the Potter's, so he sought sanctuary."

"So you elected to keep him as a rat instead of possibly turning him in to the DMLE for protection?" Hall asked. It sounded pretty weak to him, but without what he knew now, he supposed the story sort of made sense. But only sort of.

"Yes," Arthur said.

"Why?"

"He said he was afraid the news that he had survived would leak out and the remaining Death Eaters would go back to hunting for him," Arthur said.

"Did you think to try and get some Veritaserum to verify his story?"

"Yes. However, it is a restricted potion and I didn't want to answer questions as to why I needed it."

Did anyone else ever become aware that the rat was Pettigrew, to your knowledge?"

"Fred and George, but we memory charmed them," Arthur droned. "They had seen him on the map with Percy and came to us about it, wanting to go to Dumbledore."

Hall nodded at the bench. "Defence rests. It appears that the Weasleys thought they were doing a good deed by hiding Mr. Pettigrew. However-"

Before he could continue, the door banged open and a Killing Curse slammed into Arthur Weasley, who slumped, instantly dead, followed by another one, which hit his wife. Nearly two dozen Death Eaters stormed into the courtroom, flinging curses like confetti. The place erupted into instant chaos.

3: The End

Harry woke up and stirred, only to find that he was bound, hand and foot, to a chair. Glancing around, he recognized the room as the same one he and Ron had shared last summer at Grimmauld Place. "What the hell?" he muttered through cracked lips.

"Awake at last, Mr. Potter," came a sneering voice which Harry recognized instantly.

"Ah, Snivellus," Harry said amiably, doing his best not to show that his head was spinning. "Lovely to see you again."

Snape backhanded Harry hard. Harry barely moved with the blow. Scrawny old Snape had nothing on the fists of Vernon Dursley. "If you ever call me that again, I will render you into potion ingredients," he hissed venomously, spots of colour burning high on his cheekbones.

"Aw, Snivellus, I never knew you cared," Harry simpered, blowing a kiss at Snape. "Now why don't you be a good little lapdog and let me go."

Snape snarled and pulled his wand and sent a cutting hex at Harry, who rolled to the side. The chair he was on splintered, allowing him to break free of the ropes tying him to it.

"Now now, Snively, that's no way to treat a house guest," Harry scolded, wagging his finger annoyingly at Snape, looking eerily like Lockhart. "What would Dumbledore say if he knew you were hexing his precious golden boy, eh?"

"Dumbledore isn't here, Potter, and I can do what I like," Snape growled, brandishing his wand at Harry and sending more ropes out of it, which he dodged. "Besides, he has instructed us to use any force to get you here," he sneered nastily.

"Tut tut," Harry said, dancing aside as yet another vicious looking curse shot out of Snape's wand. "The esteemed leader of the light finally shows his true colours, authorizing deadly force against a teenager. I wonder what the Prophet would pay to get their hands on this little meeting of ours. Can't you see the headlines?" He paused and looked dreamy for a moment. "Death Eater Professor Attacks

Boy-Who-Lived! Albus Dumbledore endorses! Want to take bets on how long your-" he snickered and made air quotes "-teaching career lasts after that?"

"Your press cuttings will end here, because you won't remember anything that happened since the end of school," Snape sneered. "You have achieved levels of arrogance even your father could not match."

Harry pretended to wipe away a tear. "Why, my dear Professor, I do believe that's the nicest thing you've ever said to me." He sniffled. "Gets me right here, it does," he said, tapping his heart.

Before Snape could answer, he hissed through clenched teeth, dropped his wand and clutched his left forearm. Voldemort was calling him.

"Tsk tsk, Professor," Harry said, shaking his head in mock sadness. "You are so pathetic that you don't know how to do anything without somebody like Dumbledore or Moldyshorts to do your thinking for you. So sad," he said, shaking his head again.

Snape growled, actually growled at Harry, and sent a very nasty grey spell at him. Harry stepped aside and let it hit the bedpost, which melted like candy in the oven. "I will deal with you, Potter, mark my words," he hissed, before spinning and sweeping out of the room, locking the door behind him with a sharp click.

Harry sighed. I wonder how he recognized me, he thought, flopping down on the bed. Oh well, I knew it was a risk, going to the Ministry. He at least took solace in the knowledge that nobody else had recognized him at all before Snape. He had Flooed to the Leaky Cauldron and sat in plain sight at the bar, and nobody gave him a second look. It was really sad that the only thing anybody ever paid attention to was a facial disfigurement.

A knock sounded at the door. "Harry, is that you in there?"

"Tonks?" Harry said, a little surprised, as he got up and headed for the door.

"Yeah, it's me. Mind if I come in?"

"Not at all," Harry muttered. "Not like I have a choice," he added under his breath.

Tonks came in, looking as pink and spiky as usual. "Wotcher, Harry," she said brightly. "You know, if you didn't want company, you really shouldn't be here," she added cheekily, winking at him.

Harry snorted. You couldn't help but like Tonks. "And how is She-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named today?" he asked dryly.

Tonks chortled, her nose lengthening and her hair dropping to just below her waist. "I like that, She-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named," she said, changing her eyes to red and glaring at Harry. The effect was ruined by her winning smile though.

"Crikey, Harry, you look different," she said, just noticing for the first time. "No glasses, no scar ... it's like you're a new person."

"I feel like one," he said. "All my life in the wizarding world I've been identified with that stupid bloody scar. I got tired of it and had it removed yesterday."

"I understand, Harry," Tonks said, suddenly serious. "Being a metamorphmagus has been how people defined me as well. But enough of that depressing stuff; we need to get you out of here."

"But I thought you were an Order member, aren't you going to send me straight to Dumbledore so he can go crawling through my mind before Obliviating me?"

"Merlin no, Harry. I'm on your side, now come on, let's go."

"I don't believe you," Harry said flatly.

Tonks sighed. "Guess I can't blame you." She screwed up her face in disgust, making it look like a corkscrew, before pulling out her wand slowly. "I, Nymphadora Tonks, do swear on my magic that I mean no harm to Harry Potter and that I am not here under Albus Dumbledore's orders," she said. Her wand flashed, sealing the oath.

"There, happy now? I hate my name," she griped, glaring at Harry with her face still screwed up.

Harry laughed in spite of himself. "Thanks, Tonks. I believe you now. Let's go to my house and we can talk."

"You have a house? Blimey, but you have been busy, haven't you?"

"I sure have. The goblins helped me buy a house in Hogsmeade, right under Dumbledork's nose."

Tonks smiled, "Smart thinking there, Harry. Hide in plain sight."

Harry nodded. "Let's go, and you can tell me what's been happening, Dobby!"

With a pop, the little elf appeared, wearing another motley collection of clothes. Today it was bright purple trousers and a brown jumper with orange stripes. "You is calling, Master Harry?"

"Yeah, take me and Tonks home please, Dobby."

Before Tonks could object, Dobby snatched both her and Harry's hand and popped away, just before the door banged open to admit a furious Albus Dumbledore. Snape had sent a message that Potter had been captured, and then had to go and respond to Voldemort's call. But Potter was gone, and Dumbledore was too late ... Again. It was time to enlist Ministry aid in bringing him back into custody-for his own protection, of course. Longbottom might be his ace in the hole, but he still wanted the primary child of prophecy under control.

Turning, Dumbledore stormed back into the empty kitchen and headed for the fireplace. "Ministry of Magic," he said, and was spun away.

Dumbledore came out in the Ministry atrium to find a full scale battle raging. Nearly three dozen Death Eaters were battling half a dozen Aurors and miscellaneous Ministry personnel, Killing Curses and other dark spells flying lightning fast.

Dumbledore was caught off guard for only a moment, before the Elder Wand was whipping into action. A long rope of flame shot out and snared Dolohov, yanking him off his feet with a scream. Dolohov flew backwards and slammed into the base of the recently repaired fountain of Magical Brethren, effectively putting him out of the fight. Dumbledore whirled, just in time to avoid an organ

shredding curse sent at him by a madly cackling Bellatrix Lestrange. Spinning on his foot, he sent golden ropes flying out of his wand to ensnare her, while ducking to avoid a blood boiling curse from Rodolphus Lestrange. Snatching a quick glimpse around the atrium, Dumbledore didn't see Voldemort anywhere. This was his way; send his followers to weaken a target, sweeping in afterward to complete the devastation.

"Dumbledore!" came a shout from across the atrium. Sure enough, it was Voldemort.

"How nice of you to join us today, Dumbledore, the day on which I make my final bid for power and succeed. With Potter out of the way, nothing will stand before me now."

"You will not win, Tom," Dumbledore said, advancing across the rubble-strewn atrium.

"So confident, Dumbledore, you, who have driven away the prophesied child, the only hope of defeating me, think you can win against me?"

"There is one other child of prophecy, Tom," Dumbledore said, cracking a fire whip at Voldemort who stepped away from it.

Voldemort cackled, "Longbottom? He is nearly a squib," he responded, sending a bone vanishing curse at Dumbledore, who dodged it, returning a stunning spell.

"Nevertheless, if Harry will not fight you, Mr. Longbottom certainly will," said Dumbledore, sending an icicle spear at Voldemort.

Voldemort stepped aside and snarled, "Avada Kedavra," sending a green killing curse at Dumbledore. Dumbledore realized just in time that there was no Fawkes to take the curse for him, and stepped aside, letting the curse shatter one of the golden grills in front of the lifts. The Death Eaters abandoned the Aurors and started congregating in on Dumbledore. Smirking, Voldemort stepped back and started throwing Killing Curses left and right like sweets at a birthday party.

Caught unawares and too slow to react, Aurors and other personnel started dropping like flies.

Meanwhile, Dumbledore was fighting five Death Eaters at once. They had started using a cascading spell effect, two of them would fire two spells, step back, letting two more come and fire two more spells in a never ending torrent. There were always two or more Death Eaters firing at Dumbledore simultaneously, not giving him a chance to do anything but shield. It was a devastating tactic, rather like cover fire with never-ending machine guns. Even with the Elder Wand, Dumbledore was losing ground, and losing fast. It was time to turn the tables.

Ducking under another green Killing Curse, Dumbledore Apparated behind his attackers and sent more golden ropes from his wand, which wrapped them up in a package like a side of beef. He summoned their wands and slipped them in his pocket. It was time that he do what Harry was supposed to do: disembody Voldemort again. Much as he hated to, he had to use the Killing Curse to do it.

Turning, Dumbledore ducked a flaying curse and advanced toward Voldemort. "It is time we end this, Tom," Dumbledore said gently. "There has been enough killing."

"The killing is your fault, Dumbledore. All you had to do was surrender," Voldemort sneered, sending a sickly yellow Cruciatus Curse at him, which he dodged. More Aurors had joined the fighting, occupying the other Death Eaters, who gave up attacking Dumbledore to meet them.

"You started this war, Tom, all because you had an unhappy childhood," Dumbledore said sorrowfully. "And now, it is time it ended." Dredging up all the memories of the lives Voldemort had taken, all the families torn asunder, all the orphans, Dumbledore jabbed his wand at Voldemort and murmured: "Avada Kedavra."

Eyes widening, Voldemort didn't move in time to duck the green curse. For the second time in a row, he was yanked out of his body. But this time, something different happened.

Voldemort cursed himself for not learning his lesson last time. He was about to drift up through the ceiling to go and start the potion which had returned him to a body two years ago, but before he could, he was viciously yanked in four different directions, before the ephemeral bands of magic and life force tethering him to his

Horcruxes snapped and his bits of soul coalesced into one mass. And, before he could try and possess one of his followers through their Dark Marks, the magical backlash of all those bits of soul coming together severed the bonds he had tied himself to his followers with, via the twisted Protean Charm.

The magical backlash of the suddenly severed links slammed into all his followers, rendering them either unconscious or dead, depending on their power level. In short, Lord Voldemort, formerly Tom Marvolo Riddle, was dead, by the hand of Albus Dumbledore. And because he didn't have Harry Potter's magic to leech off of, he was gone for good this time.

Dumbledore watched with amazement as his Killing Curse struck Voldemort. He hadn't really expected it to work for a second time. He was even more amazed as he watched four bits of black mist come in through the wall, wailing pitifully as they rejoined the whole, before even more tendrils shot in from various directions. Then, to his further amazement, the mist disappeared; Voldemort was dead.

He didn't have time to consider why this might be, however. As he was about to turn and head for the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, a newly marked Death Eater by the name of Marcus Flint, a staunch supporter of pureblood rights everywhere, saw his lord die. Before he plummeted into unconsciousness, he sent a Killing Curse at Dumbledore's back. The leader of the light and the leader of the dark lay, dead, side by side, in the Ministry atrium. It was a very anticlimactic end to the war, but that is so often how big events begin and end, with small things.

There was a deathly silence in the hall. The polished wooden floor was littered with bodies, bloodstains and smashed statuary. Only a few survivors of the twenty odd fighters were left. Before long, word would spread all over magical Britain. Voldemort was dead, and all his followers with him. A small funeral would be held for Albus Dumbledore, but because of Harry Potter's letter in the Daily Prophet and the investigations it started, not many would mourn his passing. He was charged posthumously with corruption, child neglect, child abuse, child endangerment, and a number of other political crimes. His name would only be a small addendum in the history books, and before long, even that would disappear.

A month or so later, Harry Potter took the title of Lord Black and Lord Potter, where he began to influence the Ministry for a more forward-thinking wizarding world. He hadn't wanted to at first, but Tonks finally managed to persuade him. "You leaving them all behind will make sure that both Dumbledore and Voldemort win, love," she said to him in bed numerous times. "Go in there and clean it up, so that no other children will have to go through what you did."

Finally persuaded, he threw his all into cleaning things up. He achieved a number of remarkable things in his tenure as Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, a title which he held until he died at the age of a hundred and ninety-five. He eventually married Nymphadora Tonks, much to the chagrin of the old Pureblood hangers on, since he was her head of house. Neither of them cared, however, about the bleatings of a bunch of dried up old traditionalists. Mrs. Potter Black gave him four sons, one of whom ascended to be Hogwarts Headmaster. None of his sons were named Albus Severus.

After the death of Arthur and Molly Weasley in the courtroom, Ron and Ginny had managed to escape by fleeing behind the bench and hiding there, since they had no wands. Even if their parents were cleared of harbouring a fugitive, Ron and Ginny had become known as the betrayers of Harry Potter, and, even though Voldemort was dead, they found their lives in magical Britain to be less than stellar.

Remus Lupin committed suicide three years later, after having been cleared of any knowledge that Pettigrew was at the Weasleys and being cleared of suspicion of working for Voldemort, by aiming the Killing Curse at himself. He left no note behind, and nobody missed him at all.

Hermione Granger finished her schooling at Hogwarts. She ended her career there as she started it, friendless, shunned and alone, and promptly disappeared back into the Muggle world. Her dreams of one day becoming Minister of Magic were shattered into kindling. She ended up working at her parents' dental practice as a secretary, and she got the distinct impression that her parents had given her the position very reluctantly. They finally got the story out of her, about her true years at Hogwarts and what she had done, and to say they were displeased with her would be an understatement..

Ronald and Ginevra Weasley also finished their careers at Hogwarts. Ron had tried a relationship with Hermione, but she eventually grew tired of him and, in a shouting match that would be remembered in Gryffindor tower for years, broke up with him.

Fred and George Weasley had stepped up to fill the guardian position for their younger siblings, after the death of their parents. The stigma that had marred Ron and Ginny spilled over on to the twins as well for a while, but Harry publicly told the twins that he didn't hold them responsible for their younger siblings' actions. Ron and Ginny took up residence above the twins' shop, where they became unwilling product testers. For years afterward, they still jumped at loud noises and looked over their shoulder. The twins became known as real party animals and Harry was often over at their flat, partying into the night. Ron was forced to serve as a butler for these events and Ginny made to clean up after them. After all, it was what she wanted, only to be performing these roles for Harry.

Ron never advanced beyond stockboy at the twins' shop. Ginny had tried to become a professional Quidditch player, but her history worked against her, and she was politely turned down. Eventually she had taken up working for the Daily Prophet, as a sports writer, one of the lowest paying jobs there.

Amelia Bones had been voted in as Minister, a position she held for twelve years. She, along with Lord Potter Black had ushered in a new age of prosperity, and she would be one of the most fondly remembered Ministers in history.

Neville Longbottom fared a little better than Ron and Ginny. With the death of Albus Dumbledore, nobody knew of the time release blocks on his magic, and it all came exploding out a week later, rendering him a squib for real and nearly killing those around him, while damaging a lot of property. He soon realized the mistakes of his actions and publicly apologized to Harry, who decided that Neville had given in to peer pressure and provisionally forgave him. It was hard to re earn Harry Potter's trust after losing it.

Neville had gone to work for an apothecary, as a potion ingredient harvester. His travels took him all over the world, where he eventually met his wife, Maribel Mendoza, in Argentina. They settled there, and Neville started up his own apothecary. It was rather ironic

that the subject he hated most in school ended up making him a living.

Luna Lovegood graduated Hogwarts and took up as a crypto zoologist, travelling around the world and writing articles for the Quibbler that grew more and more outlandish as her sanity eroded, due to an undiagnosed schizophrenic condition. She eventually died in Africa, torn apart by a lioness when she thought she saw a Crumple-Horned Snorkack sitting in the middle of her cubs.

Most of the members of the Order of the Phoenix were arrested for vigilantism. The only ones who got out of prison time were Nymphadora Tonks, Alastor Moody and Kingsley Shacklebolt, both of whom claimed to be working in their capacity as attachés of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Harry took Tonks and Andromeda back into the Black family and gave them both jobs working for his growing political enterprises, jobs which they both did well. Tonks never let her pregnancies slow her down either.

The body of Voldemort was publicly flung through the Veil of Death in the Department of Mysteries, followed by each and every one of his followers. He, too, ended up being nothing more than a footnote in the history books; the very thing he feared above all others. The founders' artefacts he turned into Horcruxes were never found again, although many still sought after the diadem of Ravenclaw. The Elder Wand's power was broken as its new master, Marcus Flint had died undefeated.

Peace reigned in magical Britain for almost two hundred years. All was well.

Epilogue: Thirteen Years Later

Hermione Jean Granger sighed and wiped yet another small child's nose. "It'll be all right, dear," she said to the little girl, who sniffled mournfully. "It won't hurt and you can get a nice lollipop after you're done, how will that be?"

"Really? Neat," the little girl said, perking up a little. "I wanna go colour now."

"You may do that, dear," Hermione said, handing the girl a colouring book and some crayons.

Hermione sighed again and reflected on her life. Who would've thought that Hermione Granger, brightest witch of her generation, would be reduced to wiping snotty noses and filling out patient forms at her parents' dental practice? That too, a position that she was sure was given to her reluctantly by her parents. Every application she'd turned in had been rejected for one reason or another. She took the Daily Prophet at her house and had watched Harry Potter's astronomical rise through the Ministry and felt very resentful. It should've been her advising him, not Andromeda Tonks. She, Hermione Granger, didn't do anything wrong, so why, oh why did everybody turn on her?

Just then, a man in a sharp Armani suit strode briskly through the door, "I have a notarized letter for a Miss Hermione Granger," he said, consulting a clipboard.

"That's me," Hermione said from behind her desk.

"Here you are, now just sign the form here," the man said, barely looking at her.

Hermione signed the form and was handed a thick creamy parchment envelope. It wasn't until the man was just about to close the door that she recognised him. "Harry?"

Rising quickly, Hermione ran through the office and yanked open the door. Glancing frantically up and down the busy street, she didn't see him anywhere. Wait, there was a limousine, just turning down a side street.

"Harry!" she screamed, racing down the sidewalk, bumping into pedestrians and leaving shouted curses in her wake. "Harry!" But by the time she reached the corner, the limo was out of sight. Standing there, Hermione looked dejected. Head hanging, she trudged slowly back to the dental office and picked up the envelope Harry had handed her.

Inside was an invitation. Hermione felt her eyes well up with tears as she read it.

To all witches and wizards of Great Britain:

It is with great excitement that I, Chief Warlock Harry James Potter Black, do hereby invite you to the inauguration of the first Muggle-born Minister of Magic, Michael Corner. This event marks a crowning achievement in wizarding history, for never before has a Muggle-born held such a prominent position in the Ministry.

The inaugural ball and acceptance speech will take place in the grand Ministry ballroom on October the third at eight PM. Should you desire to attend, please present this invitation in the atrium.

Join us as we bring forth a new era of cooperation, effectiveness and accountability and welcome Michael Corner as the new Minister of Magic.

Signed,

Harry James Potter Black

Chief Warlock

The thing that hurt about this invitation was the fact that, although Harry had delivered it personally, he made absolutely no acknowledgement of her. He, in fact, had pretended not to know her at all. There was no personal postscript; it was just another invitation, like all the others that had undoubtedly gone out. And the thing that hurt most, and the message Harry had undoubtedly been aiming for, was the fact that it could've been her giving the inaugural speech if she hadn't turned on him.

With this final slap in the face from her past life, Hermione Jean Granger put her head on her desk and cried for all that she'd lost. Nobody in the wizarding world would ever hear from her again.

THE END